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A Doctor in Corduroy

Max Baring

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A Doctor in Corduroy

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A DOCTOR IN CORDUROY

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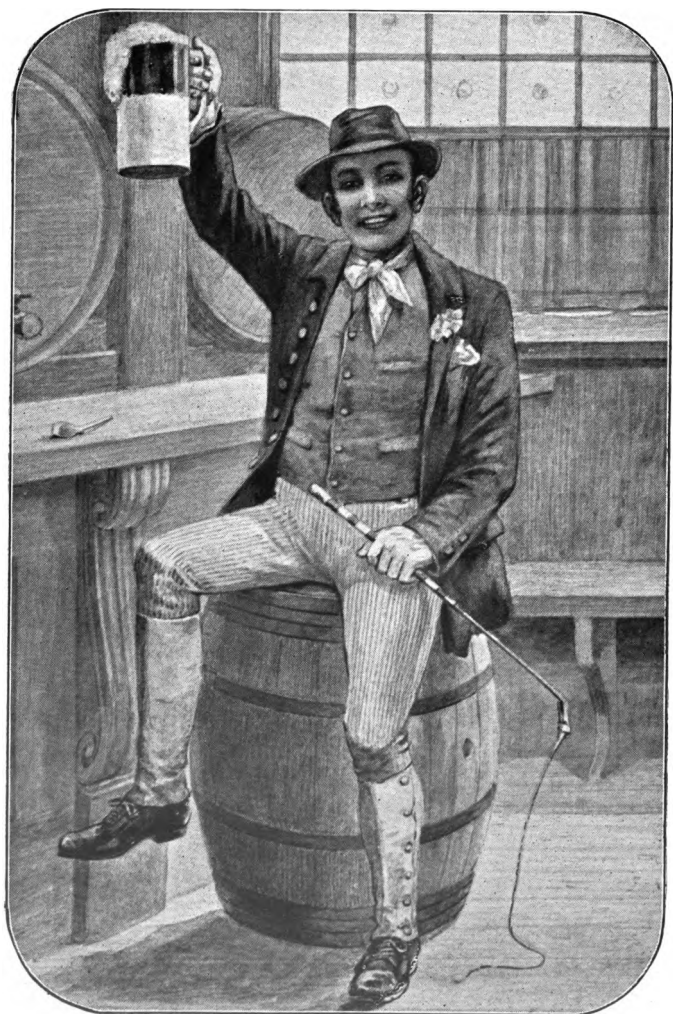
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1 Corduroy

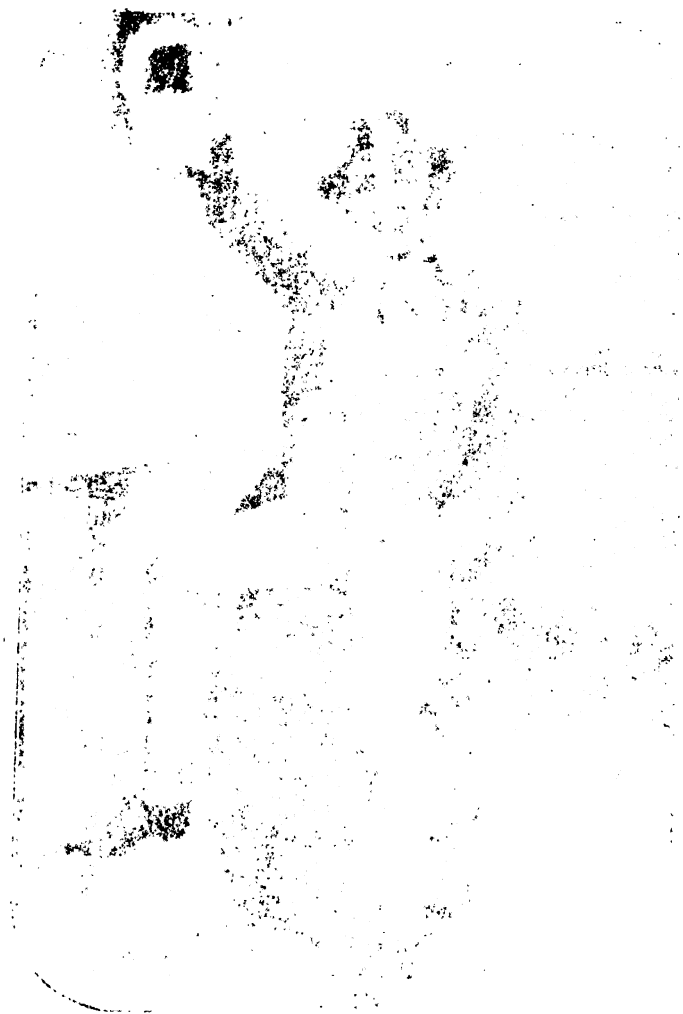
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A Doctor in Corduroy

*"Heaven doth with us, as we with torches do,
Not light them for themselves."—SHAKESPEARE.*

BY

MAX BARING

AUTHOR OF "THE CANON'S BUTTERFLY," "WHIFFS FROM A SHORT BRIAR,"
"THE TROUBLES OF A SHOVEL HAT," ETC., ETC.

FRONTISPIECE DRAWN BY M. FAUSTIN

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A Doctor in Corduroy

CHAPTER I

THE LITTLE BRAT

"STAN' out of the way, or I'll drive over yer."

A rough-looking countryman thus addressed a young woman, who, with arms akimbo, and hands defiantly resting on her hips, stood in the middle of a narrow lane.

On hearing the approach of a vehicle, the girl had thrown down the pan she held in her hand, and hastened out of her little thatched cottage, which stood but a few yards back from the road. Here she dwelt, all alone, for her brother had been dead some months. She supported herself by plaiting, and by rearing fowls, and had been busy preparing the food for the latter, when she heard the sound she knew only too well—that of a higgler's horse and cart.

"It's Tom," she had said to herself, "and he will have to stop whether he likes it or no. I am going ter have my say."

No one who had heard the sound made by this particular horse could ever have mistaken it again

for any other. Its trot was quick but even, and was, indeed, perhaps not quite what could be designated a trot at all; for it was more of a gallop, and yet not altogether that, but something between the two. And so even and rhythmical was the sound this frosty morning, that it said, as plainly as if the horse's feet had speech :

“ Three ha'pence for tuppence ;
Three ha'pence for tuppence.”

In some subtle way the horse's amble expressed the feeling of its driver, for he was a keen, hard, bargain-driving higgler.

The woman, as he approached, held up her hand for him to stop ; but as he did not slacken his speed, she fearlessly sprang into the middle of the road and stood in front of him. He pulled up his horse with a jerk, and called out in anger :

“ Stan' out of the way, or I'll drive over yer.”

“ I don't care if yer dew, Tom ; yer've done worse nor that already. I don't budge till you come down out of that cart and hear what I have tew say.”

“ I am not joking,” the man answered sternly. “ If yer don't move out of the way, I'll drive over yer.”

He reached for his whip, and took it from its socket by his side.

“ Then dew it,” the girl hissed out. “ Kill me, you coward ! ”

The man replaced his whip, threw down his reins, and got out of the cart, exclaiming, as he did so :

“ Damn yer ! what is it now—more money ? ”

"No, it's not," was the girl's answer. "Come inside and sit down, I want tew talk tew you;" and she opened a little gate that led to her cottage.

The man followed sullenly.

The girl, who could not have been more than eighteen, was a strong, healthy young woman, certainly not beautiful, but of fairly passable looks.

The man, who was some years her senior, was coarse-featured, with thick lips, and a large, square jaw. He was dressed in coarse corduroy and leathern gaiters.

"We don't want all the parish tew hear," said the girl, shutting the door.

"Well, what is it?" growled the man.

"Make me an honest woman, and it shan't cost you a penny. I can earn enough to keep myself and the brat tew."

The "brat" referred to was a babe of six months old, who lay in a rough-looking, broken washing-basket, almost at the woman's feet. It was awake, and held in its little, waxen hand a scrap of newspaper. This it moved to and fro, watching the scene around it with large, observant eyes.

Hearing the man speak, it looked up at him with a frightened expression on its little face.

"No, I can't marry you, Mag," answered the man, in somewhat kinder tones.

He felt relieved that the purport of her communication was not a further demand for money.

"Why!" exclaimed the woman angrily. "I know you want tew marry that Tuckler's girl, just because old Tuckler has got some money. But you shan't. I'll kill you first."

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"Don't be stupid, Mag. I don't want to marry anyone."

"What were you round there the other night for?"

"Buying her eggs, of course."

"No! You hadn't got your cart with you," answered the girl.

"She hadn't many to sell. She don't rear a lot like you. You know that. She ain't as clever at it as you are, Mag, I'll be bound."

"You are going there now?" said the girl.

"Just for eggs. I will take yours if you have got any."

"I sold them all yesterday tew old Stitcher. He gives more than you. You was always hard at a bargain."

"Except when I said I'd allow you eight shillings a month," answered the man.

"I could ha' made you give more if I ha' loiked. But I wouldn't, because—"

"Because why?"

"Well, Tom, I loikes yur, just a little."

Tom made no answer, but bending down, looked intently upon the child at his feet.

"Yes," said the girl; "it has got your bright blue eyes, real bonny ones, look at 'em; and see the hair is just a-growin', and it's nut-brown, like yourn. Tom—" and here the girl placed her arm on his shoulder, bent her face down close to his, and kissed his cheek. "I dew love you, Tom. Dew marry me, as you allus said yer would, and then I'll go—I'll go right away out of Allington, and take the brat tew, and you shall never see it any more, nor me, unless

you wants tew. I would go home, miles away from here, and I could take the child tew, and you should never see it again."

The man made no answer, but looked at the child for a moment intently. Perhaps his face was kinder in its expression this time, for the babe smiled.

"Poor little mite!" said the man, extending a rough finger towards it and lightly touching its chin. The babe smiled again, fastening its little white hand round the man's rough finger.

"Mag, when I come again, I'll bring that little mite a rattle."

"But you *will* marry me, won't you, Tom?" she said, kissing him again.

"Not now; some other day, perhaps, when I've made a bit of money."

"Money! money!" cried the girl, "that is all you think of. I'd be no hindrance to you. Marry me, and I will go right away and take the baby tew, as I said afore."

"Not now, Mag," was the man's reply.

The woman rose, but the man did not look at her, but at the child.

"Why, Mag, its little hands are blue with cold. Make up the fire and put another blanket round it."

"Ain't got another."

"Ain't yer? What will it cost to buy one?"

"Five shillings; and I can't afford it."

"What! cost as much as that? Well, here is one—two—three shillings towards it," and he dropped them, one at a time, into the girl's hand. "Blankets do cost

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a lot, don't they? You must try and save up the rest yourself."

Before he rose to leave, he again looked at the child. It bent its lip and uttered a little cry.

"Why, it's the cold as makes it cry, that's what it is," said the man; "and no wonder, it's freezing hard. Here, Mag, get that blanket at once," and he gave her another shilling.

Then he took from his pocket a newspaper. He opened it out, and spread it over the child's basket, tucking its little hands under the blanket. While he was doing so, the babe again fastened its tiny hand round the man's forefinger.

"Let go of my finger," he said. "Why, you are as fond of me as if I was your—"

But he stopped ere he finished the sentence, which came thoughtlessly to his lips.

"Well, so you are," said the girl, with a laugh at the man's discomfiture.

He gently unloosed the babe's finger; then, as he left the child, he waved his hand towards it. The little mite turned its head as far as it could, and followed the man with its little, bright blue eyes as he left the room.

"Good-bye, Mag! I will bring the money when it is due, not before."

"Keep your money!" cried the woman angrily. "Yew don't care one little bit for me; but you dew for that brat, I can see it. Well, if you don't make me an honest woman, you shall never set eyes on the child again."

"I don't know as I want to," returned the man.

"I can cut up rough as well as you. Good-bye! I am off to see Mary Tuckler."

He strutted off in a somewhat pompous manner, sprang into his cart, and drove away.

In less than a month after this occurrence, the country lane again echoed to the even, musical trot of the higgler's horse.

The cart stopped at the cottage, but no woman now barred its progress, or even ran out into the road to call the higgler to stop. As the man came within sight of the girl's dwelling, he drew from his pocket a few silver coins.

"I've got to give 'em," he muttered, as he looked at them grudgingly. "What a lot of money to part with; what a fool I was!" Then he drew a rattle from another pocket.

"It's all wool, and soft," he thought, "and won't hurt the little mite's face if it knocks it—and babies always do"—and he then looked at the colours—"red, green, and blue, and even a bit of yaller," he said; "ain't it gay?"

Throwing the reins on his horse's back as the cart stopped, he alighted, and striding pompously up to the door of the cottage, knocked loudly. There was no answer. He knocked again, more loudly still, and then peeped in at the window. The little white blind was removed, and the room was empty. Then he went to the back of the cottage, and found the door there unfastened.

"Whew!" he said. "Gone, eh?"

Then his eyes caught sight of an old linen basket, the child's late cradle, evidently so much broken as to be not worth removal. Lying in it was an

envelope addressed to Thomas Grainger, and inside a scrap of paper on which was roughly scrawled: "You will never see the brat again. I've taken it away for ever. I think I shall drown it most likely, as you won't marry me."

This last was only an empty threat, but the man let the paper drop from his hand, involuntarily exclaiming: "Good God! She can't mean it!" The next moment he picked it up again, and tore it carefully into shreds; then he walked back to his cart.

"Poor little mite!" he said, as he drove slowly away.

Presently he stopped at another cottage. "Now then, missus, how many eggs have you got?"

"Twelve only."

"Sixpence for 'em."

"No; a shillin'. Think how cold it has been. Hens won't lay if you feed 'em till they busted."

"Well, eightpence, then."

"No; tenpence," was the woman's dogged answer.

"Tenpence! Why, I can't get that for them at market," said the higgler. "There, ninepence, not a penny more."

"You allus was a hard 'un. I'll be sure you don't get less nor fifteenpence a dozen for 'em at market. Come now!"

"Well, here you are, missus, ninepence-ha'penny. Hand 'em over."

The woman went indoors for the eggs, and the money changed hands.

"They are uncommon small," said the man sulkily. "Ninepence ought to be enough."

"It ought, but it ain't," was the reply. "Why, what's that bit of bright green sticking out of your pocket? That's not the latest fashion in handkerchiefs, is it?"

The man looked down, and saw the scrap of protruding colour that had caught the woman's sharp eye. His red face quickly assumed a deeper red, as he exclaimed :

"Oh, that's nothin', missus."

"A bit of finery for Tuckler's girl, eh?"

"Yes," said the man, as he mounted the cart.

The woman watched the departing vehicle, and heard the "Three ha'pence for tuppence" get fainter and fainter in the distance. As the sound died away she returned indoors, muttering to herself: "He's a Grainger all over, hard at a bargain, and fond of the gels."

CHAPTER II

A DAYLIGHT FLIT

A TALLYMAN resident in Bank Street, Duckham, was in financial difficulties. He owed about three hundred pounds. His assets consisted of a horse and cart, valued by the tallyman at thirty pounds. He had also a stock of drapery and tea—and tea in those days was worth six shillings a pound. In all, perhaps its value was about four hundred pounds. Then he had book debts, in the shape of small sums, owing chiefly by farmers' wives, worth about fifty pounds, and he had capital to the amount of three shillings and sixpence-halfpenny in his pocket. There was also furniture in his cottage worth about twenty pounds, whilst another asset was a wife and child. Neither of these chattels were reckoned by the tallyman of much account, for he had decided to leave them and his furniture, together with the goodwill of his business, for the benefit of his creditors. His stock had been packed in his cart very quietly on the preceding night, and his one small book of accounts, a sort of day-book and ledger combined, he had stuck in his pocket.

He put all writs, lawyer's letters, final application for rates and rent, and every paper of that nature, in the grate. As he did so, he read, with a sort of grim

delight, such sentences as: "You are hereby summoned to be and appear at the Duckham County Court," or this, "Our client will not wait a day longer," and so on. Then he took a match from his pocket and set light to them. He was leaving behind his furniture, and his goodwill, and his wife and child. What more could his creditors expect?

The tallyman looked upon it as a very fair division, and so going off one morning at his accustomed time, about eight o'clock, no one had any idea that anything unusual was happening.

The horse knew by the weight of the cart that it had a heavier load than usual, and noticed that his master did not stop about on the road, but kept on all day until he reached a distant town. Even then, the man only put up at an inn for the night, continuing his journey the next day.

Before he left Duckham, the tallyman had locked the shed over the stable in which he kept his stock, and no one had any idea that it was now empty, or that its owner would not return as usual at night. He had got up at six that same morning, and fed his horse. Then he got his breakfast, and left his wife sleeping beside the young babe, without a word of farewell or any hint that he should never return.

When he did not come back that evening, his wife thought he must have had a breakdown with the cart; but when the second and third day arrived and there was still no news of him, she ran up the steps in front of the stable and peered through the keyhole. To her surprise, the loft, so far as she could see, was empty.

"He has gone," she said; but the words were

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spoken in quiet, indifferent tones, just as if she had said, "He is cleaning his boots."

When she returned to the house, she heard her child crying. "Bother," she said, "it's screaming again." She made no attempt to pacify it, but picked up a poker, and ran up the steps to force open the loft door.

There was some difficulty in doing this, but she was a strong woman, and after some time she burst it open.

"Where has he gone?" she exclaimed, looking round the room in search of some clue; but she could find none.

Returning indoors, she went to her bedroom, and opened a wooden box, which she had dragged from under the bed, in which her husband's clothes were kept. It was empty. Then she looked round the other rooms.

"Why!" she exclaimed, "he's even taken his Bible and hymn-book."

If she could have seen those books at that moment, she would have noticed the front fly-leaf of each was carefully torn out, for on them the man's name had been written.

"I suppose he has gone to London," thought the woman. "That's where folks generally go to hide themselves."

But the woman was wrong. The cart had journeyed on slowly for three days, but though it went due south, it did not get within a hundred miles of London. The tallyman stopped a few hours in each town as he passed through, and looked around him, leaving his cart at an inn, and going through the

various streets. Thus, several towns were inspected and rejected, until at last the tallyman saw something in Norencester which made him decide to stay there. He had noticed a small shop to let, in one of the less important streets of that town.

On his journey hither, he had called on several of the farmers owing him money, and had collected about ten pounds. With part of this he paid the first quarter's rent of the shop in advance, which was accepted instead of a reference. Then he placed his stock in it and commenced business. The next thing he did was to look round for a suitable chapel at which to attend. He soon discovered one, and became regular in his attendance, both on Sunday and on week days, whenever services were held.

This connection with a chapel helped him to know people and to bring customers. It did more; it enabled him to obtain credit in a small way for things he needed for his business, and which he could buy locally.

He had introduced himself to the pastor, and was admitted into the fold. Every week or so, the good, earnest, and simple-minded minister asked him, as he did most of his congregation: "Brother, how is your soul?" and he received the assurance that he was "holding fast to that which is good."

CHAPTER III

THE "RED LION" LETS A BED

THE last rays of the setting sun shone on the crinkled window-panes of the "Red Lion" at Burstone. They gleamed on the lion of the hanging sign, and also on the proprietor of the inn, who, at that moment, was standing at the door. The lion of the sign was red in the face; so was the man beneath it. The lion had curly hair in the shape of a mane; the man had curly hair, wide, unkempt whiskers, and beard that looked like a mane. The lion was standing on its two legs with its paws in the air; the man stood on his legs, with his paws in his pockets. The lion had been standing there sixty years; man sixty minutes. The lion had a stolid face, heavy jaw, and short, snub nose well poised in the air; man's face and position were strangely similar. The lion was sixty years old, presumably unmarried and cubless; man also sixty years old, but very much married, and with three distinct litters of cubs.

For a long time the man had stood gazing up at the lion in rapt admiration. It had just been newly painted, and the artist, in return for the sum of fifteen shillings and sundry glasses of old ale, had not been sparing with his colours.

The landlord had frequently stood watching the artist at work, and had said : " Don't you think now as a little blue on his tail would make him look grander loike ? "

The artist did not consider this any improvement, and hinted so. He thought all red was best. The landlord looked disgusted, and exclaimed :

" I didn't think, when I gave you the job, you would be mean over a bit of paint. Blue don't cost more than red, do it ? "

The artist replied that it would not be true to life.

" Come tew that," said the landlord, "' taint true, neither, tew see a lion a-hangin' up there at all ! "

The artist gave way, and the lion's tail was accordingly painted blue.

The proprietor of the Red Lion had often looked at the sign, and thought it much needed repainting ; but had seen no chance of getting it done before. He was interrupted in his gaze of admiration by a woman coming up to the door, and asking if she could have a bed for the night. The landlord slowly looked his questioner up and down, and then calling to a maid-servant : " Mawther, here's a woman wants a bed," he said to the stranger : " Take a seat over there, she will be down in a minute. Women-folk are never in the way when they are wanted. "

The applicant, who held a child in her arms, sat down on a wooden seat in the bar, and looked round at the other inmates of the room. They were six in number, and all, save one, were dressed in corduroy, tied at the knee with a piece of string. This other one, whom the Red Lion presently addressed curiously enough as " Doctor," was dressed in a

somewhat shabby velveteen coat, but had a corduroy vest and breeches; though of a rather finer make than the rest of the villagers.

"Come far?" said the Red Lion, addressing the woman. "You look as if you don't belong to these 'ere parts."

"I have come a good way," answered the woman; "and this baby is heavy to hold," she added.

"It's a fine child. Don't you think so, Doctor?" observed the Red Lion, addressing a man leaning against the bar.

"Perhaps it is," said the woman, but in tones that indicated no maternal pride in her offspring. She changed the child from one arm to the other, and there was an expression on her face, not only of weariness, but of cold indifference to the remarks of the people around her.

The man who had just been addressed as "Doctor" turned to look at the child, and an observer could not have failed to note the expression of intense kindness that came over his face. The man was not more than twenty-four years of age, a time when most unmarried men—for the Doctor was unmarried—take very little notice of babies. He touched the child under the chin with his rough brown forefinger, and the bright smile upon his own face became immediately reflected on that of the babe. But this little attention bestowed on the child did not please the mother; indeed, it did not interest her at all. She might as well have been nursing a stone image for all the notice she seemed to take of it, and it could not have been colder or harder than her face.

At this moment, a young girl came into the bar, in

feature so like the landlord, as to be unmistakably one of the Red Lion cubs.

"Where's yur mother?" asked the landlord. "Go and call her. Here's a woman and a babbie come a long way and wants a bed."

The "cub" ran away to do the Lion's bidding.

"I wonder," asked the woman, "if any of you here know a man about this neighbourhood named Grainger, who drives about from place to place with a cart?"

"Never heard on him," returned the Red Lion. "Have you, Doctor, or any of you chaps, heard the name?"

As the landlord asked the question, an expression of profound thought came to the faces of all the villagers. One by one they slowly chewed their cud of tobacco and answered deliberately and in turn:

"No, I ain't, bor."

"Can't axactly say as I have."

"Don't think I heerd on the name."

"Grainger ain't a name as be known in these parts."

"No, mate, I can't say as I heerd on the name."

The Doctor, who spoke first, had simply replied: "No, I've not."

The villagers were saved from further mental strain of this nature by the return of the Lion's cub with a request to the woman to follow her.

"Grainger," said the Red Lion, with an air of much wisdom, "is the father of that there child."

"Lawks, yer doan't say so!" said Ben Sturge, the village carpenter and wheelwright — an old man

whose body was bent and twisted with "the rheumatics."

"I dew," said the Red Lion, with a look of profound wisdom; "and I say more, she ain't married to this Grainger. Dew anyone contradict me?"

"That she bean't," said Jim Hardman, the blacksmith, with a knowing wink at the landlord.

"She's got a ring on," said Ben Sturge, "'cause I saw it."

"Brass," exclaimed the blacksmith.

"Yes, brass," observed the Red Lion. "Dew you think I don't know gold when I see it. You chaps don't have much on't. So what dew you know about it?"

"He's right there. We don't know much about gold, dew we, mates?" said Ben Sturge.

"What dew you say, Doctor," asked the landlord.

"Poor little varmint!" said Doctor John, for that was the name he was commonly known by. "What bright blue eyes it had."

"I never saw such a fule as you be if you sees a babbie," observed the landlord. "I wonder as you don't marry."

"Marry!" exclaimed the Doctor. "Isn't it enough to be ruled by one woman; why want two?"

"Mistress Sarah, she dew know how to talk," observed the Red Lion, referring to the Doctor's sister.

"Yes," said Doctor John; "and do you know, she once asked me if I thought she was clever enough to stand on the platform and talk for a quarter of an hour."

"What did you say?" asked the landlord.

"Say? I said that was not the question to ask, but could she sit still on a chair and keep quiet for a quarter of an hour?"

At this the villagers laughed heartily; and Doctor John continued: "No, mates, no marrying for me, except to this," and he raised a quart pot. "Here, landlord, fill it up. I have a patient who won't be satisfied without another dose."

"And he won't be satisfied with another dose, either. The worst of that patient of yours, Doctor, is he takes too much of my medicine sometimes."

"Never mind; who cares? Drink up, mates; 'let us be merry whiles we can.'"

CHAPTER IV

PHIL'S NARRATIVE

IN relating my portion of this story, which is in some measure the history of my life, I shall not weary the reader with any account of my ancestors, for the simple reason that I know so little about them.

I began the world, so far as I can gather, without even a name, and that which I now own was subsequently given me by a Doctor John. I am indebted to him and the gossipers of Burstone, a large, straggling village in Loamshire, for the earlier incidents which make up this story.

First, I ought to tell who Doctor John was, and how he and I became acquainted. He has been to me father, brother, and friend, and with all his faults (and they are many), I look back on his blighted life with feelings of the utmost tenderness and gratitude.

My introduction to him was certainly of a very informal character. Indeed, I must have been asleep, and very soundly so, when I was first presented to him. So was he, or he would hardly have received me as he did without a murmur of dissent. Unlike myself, Doctor John knew his parents. There had been three generations of Doctor Johns in the village. They each belonged to a calling now

almost extinct, or rather superseded; they were horse doctors—and their skill in attending to horses and cattle needing medical aid was known for miles round. It was possibly a rough and ready sort of doctoring, but it had been gained by years of practical experience; and the skill, such as it was, was passed on from father to son. This calling has now the more pretentious title of Veterinary Surgeon; but the first Doctor John came into the world, and went out of it too, long before the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons had even donned its swaddling-clothes. Indeed, if he had not, there would have been little affinity between his mode of treatment of the beasts of Burstone and ten miles round (for his practice extended so far) and that of the institution named.

I have said I began life without a name. Doctor John bore some similarity to me in that respect. He went through life without a surname, as did his father and grandfather. There was probably some entry in the parish register of births, deaths, and marriages at Burstone, and it had doubtless been used by all three on these occasions, but beyond that, the three Doctor Johns never troubled about it. Nor did the villagers.

My Doctor John had never married, and he lived in a cottage with his mother and sister Sarah, a widow, who had recently lost both husband and child. At the time I write of, Doctor John could not have been more than twenty-three. His father had been killed by a kick from a horse whilst attending it, and he thus became the only surviving Doctor John. His sister, a tall, angular woman, was ten years his senior. She kept house for him, and ruled

John, *when she could*, with a rod of iron. I have said *when she could*, because in all minor matters John gave in to her for peace' sake, but now and again he would assert his authority in a most unmistakable manner. He was "stubborn as a mule," Sarah said, and "nothing would move him." But in the latter remark she was wrong. Sorrow or distress would move him, and it did. It moved him to offer to Sarah, her husband and child, a home when they had none; and it moved him always to do his best for any poor, dumb creature he saw in pain. So much, then, for Doctor John and his home, and being unable to give the reader any account of myself save that I was a baby of six or nine months old, and of the masculine gender, I will proceed at once to relate the way in which he and I made each other's acquaintance.

Early one summer morning John was lying asleep in a ditch (in my narrative I shall call him simply by this name, for it was thus he taught me to call him). He was awakened by finding, partly on his chest and partly on his arm, a bundle that was soft and round and warm—a bundle that kicked and wriggled and screamed—a bundle that was, in short, *myself*.

If I had been old enough to observe what I was kicking against, I should have found it to be a rough corduroy waistcoat.

"Well, I'm blarmed!" he exclaimed, in astonishment. He spoke in a thick, husky voice, slowly opened his sleepy eyes, and gazed wonderingly at the child then lying on his chest.

"How did you come here?" he asked, observing me.

The only answer I made was to cry and kick vigorously.

"That will do, little 'un. Not so much noise. Here, let me get up. Lor! How did I come here?"

So saying, he pushed the child away as carefully as his unsteady hand would permit, rolled himself on one side, and with a great effort raised himself slowly to an upright position, or as near to it as a man who has been very drunk the previous night could steady himself to do the next morning.

"What's to be done?" John muttered, looking at me. "Who put you on my chest?"

By way of answer I still cried vigorously.

"I expect the little varmint wants its mother. Hi! here, missus," he called out, in his loud, gruff voice, "come and feed the babbie; it's hungry."

But no "missus" answered his call.

"Well, this is a rum go," he said. "No mother, and you are hungry. So am I, and it's breakfast-time, and I've been asleep here all night. I had the devil in me again yesterday, and I don't think he is very far away now. What shall I do with *you*? Can't leave you there squealing like that."

"John, whose child is that?" exclaimed a man who had just come up.

The speaker was a tall, thin man, with lank, oily hair hanging in long curls on his shoulders, and eyes so red all round the lids that John called them "key-hole eyes." He had a pale, mealy-looking face, and was dressed in black, or rather clothes that had once been black, but now were tawny brown. He was a draper, and kept a little shop in Norencester, a town a few miles away.

"Why, it's Luke Shepherd," exclaimed John.

"What are you doing?" returned Luke, "and whose child is that?"

"Whose child is that?" repeated John, slowly scratching his head, and looking about for his hat, which had dropped among the nettles. "Why, that's just what I should like you to tell me. It ain't mine; perhaps it's yours."

Luke Shepherd held up his hands in horror.

"Doctor John," he said sternly, and emphasising each word with a downward beat of his long, thin forefinger, "I have often been told you are a drunkard."

"Really!" said John, looking at his late bed in the ditch with an amused expression on his face. "Shows great knowledge on someone's part. I should never have b'lieved it myself."

"Drunkenness is bad enough," resumed Luke Shepherd, "but I did not think you added *that* to your other sins"—pointing to the child.

"Look here," replied John, "I don't know what you're insinuating, and I don't care a damn, but *that's* crying, and *that's* hungry, and I am going to take *that* home for Sarah to feed. She's got an old feeding-boat somewhere, and if not, she must borrow one. You try and find the mother of *that*, and the father too, and meantime, we'll keep *that* from starving."

With this, John stooped down and picked me up somewhat roughly, but not intentionally so. He reeled as he did it, his heart was evidently better than his balance; and then, without exchanging any further words with Luke Shepherd, he walked away,

swinging somewhat from side to side as he did so. This movement, rough as it was, soothed me, for John afterwards told me that directly he took me up I ceased to cry, and presently made a little noise of pleasure, which sounded to him like cooing.

Before John reached the cottage, I was fast asleep in his arms. As he entered his little dwelling, his sister Sarah stood by the door. She was about to pour forth her wrath upon him for having been out all night when she beheld me.

"Lawks a-mussey! what's that?" she exclaimed.

"A baby," said John, as he carried me in.

He spoke in tones as matter-of-fact as if he had been bringing in the morning milk instead of a forsaken child.

"Yes; but *whose* baby?" asked his sister.

"That's just what I should like to know," said John.

"Where did you get it from? and who gave it you? Lawk, man, do speak! Don't stand there like a lump of wood."

"Take the baby," said John. "It will wake up directly."

"Of course, it will. No one but a blockhead like you would suppose it would sleep always. When is its mother coming for it?"

"I don't know. Didn't I tell yer I don't know whose bab it is," said John. "Find the feeding-boat."

"Find the feeding-boat!" returned Sarah, in tones of great disgust. "You think I have nothing to do but feed every little bastard that you find in the road. Haven't I enough to do to look after you, and don't I work like a slave all the week, and

break the Sabbath cooking your dinner on Sundays, cos you will have hot wittles when all Christians has cold?"

"Find the feeding-boat," interrupted John.

"It's three years since I used it, and I expect it's broke, and if it isn't broke, it ought to be; and I think it's cruel to remind me of my lost child in this way. What did I come here for? Not to spend all my time looking for feeding-boats. Ah! if I had my time over agin'!"

"Find the feeding-boat!" said John.

"Was ever a woman so ill-treated, so wretched as I am? I suppose there will be no peace till I go and look for it. Well, we will feed it, and then you shall take it to the Police Station."

"I shan't take it to any police station," returned John slowly.

"Well; take it to the work'us. I don't care which."

"Nor work'us, neither," was the quiet but firm answer.

"What will you do with it, then?" said his sister, sitting down and folding her arms.

"Keep it here till the mother comes for it," answered John.

"Its mother comes for it! John, you get a bigger fool every day."

"Perhaps I do; perhaps I don't," was John's dogged answer. "Fool or no fool, what I say now is, *find the feeding-boat.*"

These last words were rapped out with a decision and sternness which had an immediate effect.

His sister went off sullenly to do his bidding. After some little search, the feeding-cup—boat-like

in shape—was found, some milk was warmed and put in it, and given to the child by John himself.

When the baby had finished its food, it made some little gurgling noise of pleasure.

"Listen!" said John. "The little varmint! it's saying its grace."

CHAPTER V

ENTERED IN THE BOOK OF LIFE

"NOBODY has been to claim that baby yet, I reckon?" said the landlord of the "Red Lion," as he wiped a glass, and held it up to the light to see if it was clean.

"No," answered Doctor John.

"I suppose you don't know who the father is, Doctor?" said Jim Hardman, the blacksmith, meaningly.

"No, I don't," answered Doctor John curtly.

"But it's the baby the woman had with her the other night, ain't it?" asked the landlord.

"I am sure I don't know," replied Doctor John; "babies are all alike. They have got little innocent faces, sweet as daisies, and minds like clean sheets of note-paper, with none of our wretched passions written on them."

"You're in a moralising mood," observed the Red Lion. "You're a queer chap; one minute the devil is in you, and the next you talk like a saint."

"There's not much of the saint about *me*," said Doctor John. "Fill the mug; I'm dry. Saints never are; only those who talk about them."

"It's a bastard, of course," said Bloggs, the village shoemaker.

"Maybe it is, and maybe it ain't," returned John. "I don't know, and I don't care."

"I say," said Hardman, in a confidential tone, "*you* ain't the father, are you?"

"Wish I was," answered John, in a tone of such earnestness that all suspicion was at once completely dispelled.

"Why do you, mate?" asked Ben Sturge.

"Why do I?" said Doctor John. "Why, because if I was the father, I should not stand quite so much chance as I do now of losing it, should I?"

"Of course you wouldn't, bor," answered Sturge.

"But you don't mean tew say as how you want tew keep it?" asked the Red Lion, in a tone of great surprise. "That be a rum 'un; but then, you allus were a 'strordinary sort of chap."

"So he be," chimed in Bloggs.

"I am hoping the baby won't be claimed, for I am getting fond of it," remarked John. "I am going to name the little varmint, but what name, I don't know."

"I have heard how they used to name children in London," said the Red Lion, "at the Foundling Hospital. They named 'em after the street they were picked up in. Where dew you say as you were asleep when you found it?"

"In Farmer Philman's ditch, at the bottom of Seven Acre field. It was your bad beer that did it."

"Na, na, mate; it wasn't the beer," said the Red Lion. "It were because you took too much on't."

"Loike he generally do," said Bloggs sarcastically.

At this there was a laugh all round, shared in by a ploughman and a drayman who had just entered.

"Philman Ditch," said John musingly. "Well, one could shorten it, and say Phil Ditch."

There was a general chorus of "So yer could, bor, so yer could ;" as though John had made some wonderful discovery.

"Then," said the Red Lion slowly, "look at Ditch. What a fine name for a boy."

"Or girl, for that matter," said Bloggs.

"Yes ; but it be a boy, ain't it, Doctor?" exclaimed one of the group.

John gave a nod of assent.

"Ditch be a good name for a *boy*," continued the Red Lion ; "but fust I ses, why be it a good name for a boy?" The Red Lion waved the stem of his pipe in the air, and continued in his pompous and sententious manner : "A ditch don't never cry, it don't ever stay away from schule, it don't never rob orchards, and a ditch don't never throw stones ;" and the Red Lion paused, to see what effect his eloquence had made on his audience.

There was a chorus of "You be right, mate," a knocking on the floor with sticks, and a pattering of the table with hands. Over the face of the Red Lion came a substantial smile of gratified pride. He knew that he was a very clever man ; had long known it.

The only one of the eight or nine men in the room who did not join in the merriment was Doctor John. He seemed to be absorbed in thought.

"And why be Ditch a good name for a *man*?" said the Red Lion, with a wave of his open hand. "I will tell you."

"So will I," said John, rousing himself from his

apparent reverie. "It's sometimes dry like I am. Landlord, fill the pot first, and talk afterwards."

There was more laughter at this remark.

"That is where I and a ditch resemble each other," continued John. "Now, I will tell you where a ditch and I don't resemble each other."

"How's that?" asked Bloggs.

"Why," said John, as he raised the pot to his lips, "a ditch is often full of water, I never am!"

Great laughter, stamping of floor, and cries of "That's a good 'un. Go it again, Doctor. Give us another."

"Serious, mates, for a moment. I don't know, though, but what Philman Ditch won't do for his name as well as any other; so Philman Ditch it shall be—that is, if Sarah is agreeable, and I don't suppose she will care. As for poor old mother, it don't make much difference to her. She gets deafer every day."

"I was going to say," remarked the landlord, "why it be a good name for a man. "A ditch don't never marry the wrong woman, a ditch don't never have the rheumatics, and a ditch, though it may get old, it never die. If we were all ditches, Ben here would never have a coffin to make or a grave to dig."

More laughter from all the company.

"A ditch," remarked Doctor John, "is like me, it's a drain which is seldom full. It's allus at a low level like me. There never was a ditch or a Doctor John at the top of the hill," he added, with a touch of sadness in his voice. "But who cares? Drink up, mates, and be merry."

Rapping of table and further laughter.

"Mates," said the Red Lion, raising his glass, "let's all drink to the health of *Philman Ditch*."

"Here's a health to Philman Ditch! A bumper, a big 'un," cried the guests, pleased with the unusual novelty of their entertainment.

"Wait a bit," said Bloggs. "Doctor ought to stand drinks all round."

"So he dew ; so he dew," said the landlord.

"Damn yer, so I will," said John, springing to his feet. "'Taint every day that we kill a pig and eat the chitterlin's. Here, landlord, drinks all round. Now then, mates," he continued, when the glasses were filled, "three cheers for Philman Ditch."

As John raised his pot to his lips, he stopped suddenly in the very act. He said, in after years, that a little white face came instantly before him with its bright blue eyes, which were so pure and innocent.

"One moment, mates," he cried, and he strode to the door, and dashed the contents of his mug into the road. Then he went up to the bar, and said : "Give me a glass of water, landlord. I'll drink the little chap's health in that."

A burst of ironical laughter filled the room.

"Have a drop of gin in it, mate," said the Red Lion. "It's the same colour."

"No," answered John, in tones of quiet determination. "Look here, mates," and he pointed to their mugs—"that's the stuff as puts the very devil in me sometimes."

"That's because you will have tew much on't," said the Red Lion, in tones of annoyance.

"Water is all very well for limp, scraggy chaps

like that Luke Shepherd, who, I suppose, has been preaching to you," said Jim Hardman, with a sneer, "but if you want to get *that*"—and he placed his hand on the muscle of his arm—"you must have good old ale. What say you, landlord?"

The Red Lion waved his pipe grandiloquently.

"Water," he said, "in the sea be wondrously magnificent, and it move about like a field of corn; water in the river be useful, it turns Stiggin's mill; water in a pond is all right to wash with, if it ain't tew muddy; but water in a man!—well, it's water, and it's out of place."

This remark was greeted with general cheering.

"I know a chap," said Ben Sturge, "as has got water in him, too much on't; and the doctor he say it's dropsy, and he call twice a week to tap him."

"Have your water," said the Red Lion, "and put a drop of gin in it, mate. As I said afore, it's the same colour."

"I know it," answered John. "I like it, and it likes me, perhaps a bit too well. I'm not a milk-sop; any other time I will drink with the best of you. One good old 'drunk' more or less won't hurt me. But somehow, mates—" and here he lowered his voice until it grew quite tender, "when I think of that innocent babe, it don't seem quite right. It don't seem, somehow, as if they go together, and I don't feel as if I could drink it in that. Philman Ditch, your health!" and he raised the glass of water to his lips.

"I should think," said Bloggs, with a sneer, "you've quite forgotten the taste of that stuff; makes you feel sick, don't it?"

"Yes," said John, "of your company," and he strode out of the bar, evidently annoyed.

Doctor John went straight home, and the first thing he did was to go and look at the child. As he did so, the expression on his face quite altered. Every trace of annoyance left it.

"Sarah, what name would you like for the little varmint?"

His sister was seated in the front room with her Bible on her lap. It was open at Judges: she dearly loved to read of battles and the slaughter of the heathen. She was not reading now, but talking to Luke Shepherd.

"Take it to the work'us," observed Sarah. "It will soon have a name given it there, or a number."

John took no notice of his sister, but addressing the babe, said:

"I wonder what you would like for a name? If you could speak, what would you say?" and he playfully danced the child about in his arms.

The "varmint" evidently approved of this, for it smiled again, shook its little hands with delight, and again made a little gurgling noise that sounded like "Coo, coo."

"Coo," said John, imitating the child. "That's what you want for a name, is it? Well, it's short, and it's uncommon."

"John, you are a fool," said Sarah.

"Yes; and I know it," returned John, his temper quite unruffled. "I always was."

"If I might suggest a short name, and an appropriate one," observed Luke Shepherd, "I should say *Shame*."

"Perhaps the child was born in wedlock," observed John quietly, "and perhaps it was not. I don't know as that will make any difference to me. I found the child in the ditch."

"Or it found you, you mean," said Luke Shepherd, with a sneer.

This man was a friend of Sarah's. She had made his acquaintance at Zion Chapel, Norencester, and he frequently called to chat with her, and also to enjoy a good supper at John's expense.

"I am going to adopt it," resumed John.

"And teach it to drink like you do yourself," added Sarah.

John looked at her; there was an expression of pain on his face, but he made no answer. The taunt had the sting of truth, bitter truth, and he knew it. But as he turned his face from his sister to the babe, the pain left it.

"The child must have a name," said John quietly. "What shall it be, Sarah?"

"Don't ask me," was the rejoinder.

"But I do ask you," repeated John.

"Well, then, call it Ahab," answered Sarah.

"Coo, coo," came from the little child in John's arms, followed by "Ay—ay—ay—ay."

"Ah, you will talk soon," said Doctor John, looking at it; then addressing his sister, he went on: "Well, if you have no better name than that to suggest, we will call him Philman Ditch."

"Philman's ditch! Why, that's where I saw you drunk," observed Luke Shepherd.

"Wonderful memory you have! You are quite correct," answered John, "and I have so named him,

unless Sarah has a better. I drunk his health at the 'Lion' in that name."

"I'll warrant you did," answered Sarah.

"I drunk his health in water," answered John quietly. "I wish—I wish—"

"Well, what?" snapped out Sarah.

"Oh, never mind," answered John.

"Well, you are a fool," answered Sarah. "You drink and drink till your brains are getting soft. *You drink water!* Ah, well; there was plenty of gin below to mix with it, I'll warrant. And you just say that to get round me. A drunkard is bad, but a maudlin, drunken fool is even worse."

John did not answer her, but turning to Luke Shepherd, said:

"What day was it that you saw me in the ditch?"

"It was a Saturday. I remember it, because I was going to call on Farmer Philman for an account he owes me."

"Saturday," observed John. "Ah, yes; I know now the date as well. It was the day Grunby's mare foaled."

John sat for a little while very quiet; for several minutes he did not even utter a word.

Then Sarah broke upon his silence.

"John, do you really mean to be so foolish as to keep this child altogether?"

"I do," was the quiet but very firm answer.

"What will people say?"

"I don't know, and I don't care."

"You won't take him to the work'us?"

"Not while I have a penny left for his food."

"Ah!" said Sarah, with a sigh, "I feared it would come to this."

John made no reply, but took up the child, fed it with the little feeding-boat, then laid the babe down gently, and watched it till it slept. Presently he moved quietly away and opened the big family Bible that was lying on the table.

Sarah watched him. It was seldom that he opened its pages. He rose from the table, went into another room, and came back with pen and ink.

"What are you going to do now, John?" asked Sarah.

"I am going to write his name in it, and the date when I found him, also the place," answered John quietly.

"God forbid!" said Luke Shepherd, in tones of strong reproof. "Think, man, how dare you profane God's Holy Book by entering in it the name of a bastard? What saith the Scriptures? Let me show you." So saying, Luke Shepherd turned quickly to Deuteronomy, and soon pounced upon this verse, which he read aloud:

"A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord, even to his tenth generation shall he not enter into the congregation of the Lord."

"I don't know that it *is* a bastard," said John; "but if it is, poor little mite, I don't see how it will hurt the 'Book.'"

"It has to bear the curse of broken law," answered Luke Shepherd. "The sins of the father are visited on the children. It will be able to say, in the words of the Psalmist: 'Behold! I was shapen in iniquity, and in shame did my mother conceive me.'"

"I don't know anything about that," said John, "but I shall do as I like in my own house. I have named the child, and I am going to write his name in the Book." So saying, John dipped his pen in the ink, and wrote :

"Philman Ditch, found in the ditch at
the bottom of Philman's Seven Acre field.
July 10th, 18—. Parents unknown."

"I cannot stay here a witness to such profanity," said Luke Shepherd, rising. "It's cut off from the congregation of the Lord."

John looked him full in the face, and pointing to the cradle, said: "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."

"Those are nice words to fall from the lips of a drunkard," said Sarah satirically.

John made no answer, but went out into the night, and as he passed along the dark street, he thought: "God forgive me, they are. I am not fit to utter them."

He walked on for several miles, not knowing where he was going, or caring. All his sister's bitter taunts were ringing in his ears, the hard truths she had thrown at him stung him. One word of sympathy given that day would have helped him in his fight with the vice that had mastered him; but she never uttered it.

When he had gone about three miles, he passed someone in the dark, who called to him: "Why be ye walking so fast?"

"I don't know," was the laconic answer.

"Where a-goin'?"

"I don't care. To the devil, I think."

"Well, then, you needn't walk so fast. You will get there soon enough without putting on that pace," said Bloggs, for it was he.

Doctor John did not slacken his speed ; but when he had passed the man some ten or twenty yards, he called out : "No, my friend, the devil always takes the hindermost."

Angry and hurt as Doctor John was, the gleam of his usual humour was in him still. It relieved him somewhat, for in a few minutes he stopped short, and went back to meet the cobbler.

"You're feeling a bit glum, mate, I am thinking," said Bloggs.

"Eh, that I do !" exclaimed Doctor John.

"Not surprised. It's the water. Come on, man ; come and have a quart of old ale. It's the best cure for the miserables."

"Perhaps it is, perhaps it is ! What a damned fool I was this morning to think I could do without it," said the other.

The two set off together to the nearest tavern. A few hours later John returned home drunk.

"Sotten agin," remarked his sister.

Doctor John made no reply, but reeled upstairs to bed.

CHAPTER VI

MEMORIES OF CHILDHOOD

THE few incidents I have related in the preceding chapters differ from the remainder of my story in this, that they are not—indeed, they could not be—the result of my own observations and memory. I shall now endeavour, in my portion of this story, to give the reader only what I saw or heard, and am now, after the lapse of many years, still able to recall.

Looking back into the blank of my infancy there comes, out of a confused mist of many things, first the cottage in which John, his mother, and his sister Sarah lived. The mother was a sour, whining old lady, very fond of hearing or talking about ghosts or murders, though not in the least afraid of walking through a dark wood late at night, should it chance to be a nearer way home, whilst I, walking by her side, and frightened at the least movement of a stoat on the ground, or of a moving leaf in the tree, caught hold tightly of her gown and trembled with fear.

I think our cottage was much larger, and had more rooms in it, than the other little homes of the village; for John's position was above that of the other villagers. But roomy as it was, we always, except on Sundays, lived in the "wash'us,"

which was equivalent to the modern kitchen, and not the scullery, as the reader might suppose. I think it was not considered properly furnished unless there hung from the ceiling three or four home-cured hams, sides of bacon, and long strings of onions.

Standing on a shelf in the wash'us was a large, squat stone bottle of gin, which held four gallons. John's mother was very fond of her little drop of spirit, and this was her son's annual present to her. He always spoke of it as "mother's little smelling-bottle."

In the front, or best room, we never felt comfortable, from fear of disarranging the furniture and general appointments. This was Sarah's domain, and she kept it in most severe order. I remember that on the table at equal distances were copies of the poets, and so exact was the distance between each book that you would have supposed Sarah had measured it with a foot-rule. These poets were never opened; we were allowed to admire their covers, but that was all.

I recollect that our cottage had a low, thatched roof, and wood and plaster walls, hidden by roses and grape vines, a little garden back and front; in the latter a pond, overgrown with green slime—a pond I was always cautioned by John never to go near. I recall a thick box hedge, firm and closely clipped, a green gate, having a shelf fixed at the top, on the roadside. On this I had often seen jugs and glasses standing, by which I infer that, at that time, John must have had an off-license for the sale of beer. Indeed, there was a square black board, with white lettering, fixed over the doorway, which denoted it, and much puzzled me when, a few

years later, I managed to spell out the concluding words: "Licensed to be drunk off the premises." What could it mean? That John got drunk, I knew, child as I was, only too well. I must have had a thought of that nature on an occasion a few years later I now remember well. I was standing with Sarah, in the little front garden, which she was watering, when I glanced up at the board and said to her: "What does L-I-C-E-N-S-E-D mean?"

"'Licensed' means given permission," returned Sarah.

"What does 'permission' mean?" I asked.

"Leave," she snapped out; "and you have not leave to ask any more questions, so stop talking."

I was quiet for a few minutes, but then resumed: "Pre-mi-ses means the cottage, don't it?"

"And garden," answered Sarah, "back and front, pond and everything. If you stand in the road, and lean right over the shut gate into the garden, and hold the mug in your hand a yard this way, you are off the premises; but if you stand with the gate open and one heel half an inch in the gateway, and your mug and mouth bent over a yard into the road, you are on the premises. But what has that got to do with you? I never saw such a boy for asking questions. Now, tell me what you want to know for, and why you have asked me all this?"

But I was too loyal to John to make any answer that would seem to refer to his weakness. I made some stupid, evasive reply, and was sent indoors with a box on the ears. I could not at all understand Sarah's answer, but the whole thing seemed to have reference to John and his drinking, and I resolved

to say no more about it. But I hoped someone would steal that board in the night, and take it away and nail it over another cottage. Let someone else have leave "to be drunk off the premises," not my dear old John. I assumed this board was put there as a sort of punishment, or label of disgrace. I never took it to be the most gracious permission of the Justices of the Peace to permit the sale of pots of beer for the villagers' suppers! But although we sold beer, John never drank any at home, other than a little with his meals. It was never at home he got drunk.

But there were other things I remember of the cottage. There was a small room which John kept locked. It was his dispensary; and I was never tired of watching him mix his medicines from the various large bottles ranged on shelves. I remember nasty smelling fluids, large stone jars of ointments and horse pills, the latter like small black sausages. I was very fond of seeing John administer these. He would throw off his coat, and taking one, thrust his hand and arm right down the horse's throat. I remember, too, that there were horrible-looking knives and surgical instruments hanging from the wall.

In John's "drug shop"—it was too unpretentious to be called a dispensary, and it was thus John spoke of it—were two bottles of spirit. They were whisky and brandy, holding, I think, a quart each. He was permitted by the Excise to obtain these for use in his profession free of duty, and of course they cost much less than that bought in the ordinary way. Although he frequently got drunk, I never

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knew him to touch this spirit. Once I heard one of his comrades ask for some of it, and he answered: "No, mate. That's for the dumb brutes, and I never touch it. Let's go to the Lion."

"Not good enough, eh?" was the query.

"It's quite pure," was the answer. "That is not it."

What else has imprinted itself on the fair page of childhood's memory? Let me think. The beautiful etchings of Love that should be there are faint beside the dark imprints of Fear.

I recall, as vividly as though I had seen it but yesterday, a picture that frightened me when I lay in my little bed awake, and that haunted my dreams as I slept. It was an illustrated copy of the Lord's Prayer that hung in a gilt frame on the wall of my little garret.

To the reader it may seem impossible that these beautiful words of our Lord could have been so distorted by the ignorance of man as to become the terror of a little innocent child. I do not exaggerate when I say they were made so for me—a highly nervous and imaginative boy. I lay in the waning light of eventide, often too afraid to sleep; for if I shut my eyes to do so the picture was still before me.¹

It had been given to Sarah by Luke Shepherd soon after they met at Zion Chapel. She, with words of severe admonition, hung it beside my bed. Some portions of the Prayer, with its accompanying illustrations, I have forgotten, certainly the more beautiful, or I had better say less horrible, for the whole thing was hideous and crude.

¹ The writer saw this picture, forty years ago, in a farm-house in Suffolk.

The opening words of the beautiful prayer, "Our Father which art in heaven," were represented by the head of an old man, a sort of Father Christmas, surrounded by a daub of white and blue to represent clouds and sky; while "Give us this day our daily bread" was illustrated by a cottage loaf. But the dread of my early childhood was "Deliver us from evil." This was represented by a large black figure of a man with horns, and a long twisted tail. He held in one hand a sort of pitchfork, while the other hand seemed extended towards me. His eyes, which were two spots of red paint, seemed to start from his head; and the whole figure was enveloped in tongues of vivid red and yellow flame. I had been told, if I was naughty, this figure would come out of the frame and take me away, and that I should be burnt for ever and ever.

I remember one occasion connected with this picture. What I had done to incur Sarah's displeasure I know not, but I was sent to bed supperless and in the dark, and was told that when I went to sleep that night the black man would probably come for me. I lay awake for hours in terror. At last I heard a stumbling, unsteady step come along the garden path. It was John. Child as I was, I knew by his step that he was not quite sober. The drink always used to affect John's legs more than his mind or his speech. There were two staircases in the house, one in the front, the other in the back. Presently, to my great joy, I heard his footstep on my back stairs. However drunk he was, he never said a harsh word to me.

I heard his sister call after him :

"What is the good of me punishing him if you will take him up food? Besides, he is asleep, and if he ain't, he ought to be."

John came up to my bed, the lighted candle in his hand, moving about as though he were beating time to a very unsteady tune.

"Are you asleep, Phil?"

"No," I answered.

"Ah! you ought to have been hours ago. Have you been naughty?"

"I don't know, John. I am very sorry."

"And you have had no supper?" he said, thrusting a hand into his pocket. "Here, eat this."

"I don't want it, John."

"Don't want it. Why?"

"I don't know. I'm not hungry."

John looked at me and said, in tones of as much tenderness as his drink-laden voice would permit:

"What's the matter, little mate? Tell me."

For answer I burst into tears, and told him between my sobs that I was frightened—too frightened to sleep.

"Frightened!" exclaimed John, with surprise. "Frightened of what?"

"Of that," I said, and pointed to the picture on the wall.

John held the candle somewhat unsteadily in front of it.

"What! of that little black man?" said John, as his eye caught sight of the figure.

"Yes," I answered.

"Oh, Phil, you are too funny," and he sat down on my bed and rolled to and fro with laughter.

But his laughter reassured me, for I knew well that John would never have laughed at anything that would harm me. I was already half ashamed of my fears, for I said, half apologetically :

"I—I can't help it, John. I am all right now, but I shan't be when you have gone ; and he won't come for me, will he ?"

John rose from the bed, put down the candle on a little table, and taking the picture from the wall, threw it down the stairs, calling out as he did so : "Sarah, a nice thing this to frighten a child with. Burn the damn thing!"

Hearing the crash of broken glass, Sarah came running to the foot of the stairs.

"John, John!" she cried, in tones of horror. "What have you done? Oh, it's awful! It's the Lord's Prayer."

"Yes," answered John, as he descended the stairs, "and the devil's own painting."

We had other passages of Scripture beside this, but fortunately they were not illustrated, only illuminated in gaudy colourings. I remember there always hung on the wall of our front room one glazed and framed. But this text was changed every year. It was painted on cardboard, in gaudy colourings, and was chosen by Sarah on New Year's Eve as the clock struck twelve. She would sit before the fire with the Bible in her lap reading from it ; but as the hands of the clock neared midnight, she would close it, and take from her work-basket a pin. Then, as the clock struck the hour, she would shut her eyes tightly, open the Book at random, and at the last stroke of the

hour let the pin descend upon a verse. No matter what it happened to be, this was to become for us the text to be ever before our eyes during the ensuing year. It was thus she sought spiritual guidance. I remember on one occasion we had staring us in the face, 1 Chronicles vi. 43, "The Son of Jahath, the son of Gershom, the son of Levi." I don't suppose that we received very much spiritual benefit from that. Another time we had a verse from Timothy. "The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee." There is not much guidance to be obtained from that.

But once the pin pierced the text, "Suffer little children to come unto Me." Now Sarah hated children, but she was far too superstitious to choose any other text more in harmony with her feelings. When John saw the text, he said: "The pin did well, Sarah, this time." "Yes," was the answer; "but it didn't mean bastards."

Still looking back, I see other pictures in my memory perhaps less vivid than that in my bedroom, because less terrible. I recall a strap, a large, stiff leathern strap, that hung on the wall of our back living room—the wash'us. It was the thickness of a cart-horse trace, and was doubled. It looked about two or three yards long, and was sewn together here and there to make it stiffer. Probably it was not more than two yards in length; the perspective memory of childhood always enlarges size and lengthens distance. But it was a most formidable-looking strap. How long it had hung on the wall before I made any observation upon

it I don't know, perhaps a year or two. I remember I was sitting one evening on my little wooden stool in front of the fire. John was smoking his pipe, and his sister Sarah busy sewing. I was getting tired and fretful. Presently my eye rested on the large strap.

"What is that for?" I asked, pointing to the strap as it hung on the wall.

"To beat little boys like you, when they are naughty," answered Sarah. "You have never felt it yet. Wait until you are bigger, then you will."

"Why shall I when I am bigger?" said I.

"Drat the boy!" said Sarah; "if you answer one question he asks another. Because you will grow up wicked."

"Why shall I grow up wicked?" said I.

I should not have dared ask these questions had I been alone, but John's presence in the room always made me bolder.

"Because you are a bastard," returned Sarah.

"We don't want to hear anything more about that," said John quietly. "He is a little, innocent child."

"Humph!" said Sarah. "You are a nice one to talk about innocence. It's not much in your way."

"I never said it was," observed John, puffing out a cloud of smoke.

"I never heard of a bastard doing well," whined out John's mother.

"Of course not, the sins of the fathers are visited on the children," observed Sarah.

"What is a bastard?" I asked, turning to John.

"It's what you are," observed Sarah; "and don't ask any more questions, or you will go to bed."

A few minutes after this remark, Luke Shepherd entered and sat with us round the fire. I suppose at this time he must have been engaged to Sarah, for he was so frequently at the cottage. He had not been seated long when there was a loud knocking at the front door. John went to see who was there. Then I saw him come back into the room where we were sitting, snatch up his hat, take the strap down from the wall, and rush out with it.

"What has he taken that for?" I asked, pointing to the nail whereon had hung the strap.

"To beat some naughty children," answered Luke Shepherd.

I knew the man lied. My dear old John! (he was not old, but I cannot help using the term). Punish children with that? He would have cut off his hand first.

"That is what you will get some day if you are naughty."

"Not from John," I said stoutly.

"No, from God," answered Luke Shepherd. Then turning to Sarah, he said: "This is a fitting emblem to impress on the mind of childhood: God's great wrath."

"Yes," said Sarah; then she added, turning to me: "It's time you went to bed. Say your prayers, mind, slowly, and twice over, because you have been naughty."

The next day I said to John: "You didn't beat any children with that strap, did you, John?"

John looked at me ; he must have thought I was not in my right mind.

"What an extraordinary question to ask," said John. "Beat children ! Do I ever beat children ?"

"No," I said. "What did you use it for, then ?"

"Why, to force a tunnip down a cow's throat. It was stuck half-way and choking. Who told you such lies ?"

"Mr. Shepherd," I answered.

"I thought so," said John. "Damn him !"

But this was the last time that Luke Shepherd frightened me. He had been visiting Sarah a long time, yet for some reason or other he was never ready to marry her. But he was always ready to have his supper almost every night at John's expense. John thought the man was imposing on his hospitality, and told him so, asking him when he was going to marry her. "There is no hurry," said Luke Shepherd ; "Jacob served seven years for Rachael."

"Yes," answered John ; "but you are not serving me, except by eating my suppers."

Shortly after this, Luke Shepherd suddenly ceased to visit our cottage ; nay, more, he left quite suddenly, and was said to be heavily in debt. Where he went to no one knew. But after a year or two, Sarah heard of him as being seen by a friend of hers, a Mrs. Gubbings, who went to stay with some relations in a town in the North of England, and on going to chapel with them, who should ascend the pulpit but Luke Shepherd. Mrs. Gubbings said he had changed his name, and what it was she could not remember. He had married an old

lady with considerable wealth, and had built an Independent Chapel with some of it.

When Sarah heard it, she said contemptuously : " Yes ; sold his soul to the devil, married for money, and is giving it back to God by building a church."

As I grew older, I became less fearful of Sarah. If she was cross, I kept out of her way. If she ran after me to inflict punishment, I was sufficiently fleet of foot to outrun her. And when I did remain indoors, I generally so timed it that John was present, and before him she dared not lift her hand upon me, but had to be content with a liberal allowance of tongue. Yet never but once, that I remember, did I willingly disobey Sarah.

The shrill sound of the huntsman's horn was heard echoing through the village. I rushed indoors for my hat, and followed the hounds with glee. On my return, I was scolded by Sarah, but I was getting so used to it that I heeded it but little.

When next the horn was heard in the village, Sarah seized me, and pulled off my boots. *That* did not deter me. I rushed off without them. But Sarah was not to be outdone. The next time she heard the horn, she took off not only my boots, but pulled off my trousers too. Yet I followed the hounds without *them*, and as Sarah did not think it wise in the future to divest me of further clothing, I justly considered that I had gained the day. I do not exaggerate at all in saying she pulled off my trousers. It sounds more incredible than it was, but in those days all the village boys wore a "spencer," a sort of overall, fastened at the waist with a leather belt ; and it extended quite to our

knees, if not below them. This was the first and only occasion that I can recall in which I got the better of Sarah.

John never tried to get the better of her. He suffered much annoyance from her bitter tongue, but rarely answered back if she confined her abuse to *himself*. Once I remember speaking to him upon the subject, and suggested that he should speak more sharply to her in return. He said to me :

“Well, you see, Phil, we must make allowances, like. She is a widder, and lost her first man through a fever ; and her second—well, he courted her for seven year, and then cleared out because of debt. It don’t improve your temper, that sort of thing, you know ; and then, if she is a bit larrupy with her tongue at times—well, it is allus your best friend as tells you of your faults.”

CHAPTER VII

MAGGIE STURGE

AMONG my earliest recollections is that of the village church. What impressed me most was not its grey, flint walls, or dark, oaken rafters; it was not its rector, that looked to me as though he was just going to bed and had donned his night-shirt; not its choir of humble villagers, each trying to sing the loudest; not even its all-pervading smell of peppermints; but the sexton, Ben Sturge, who was also bell-ringer and clerk. He stood just inside the church door, and balanced himself most wonderfully, as I thought, on one foot, while with the other and his hands, he pulled three ropes, which gave forth from the squat, square steeple a booming

*"Come to church;
Come to church."*

Just outside the old building, indeed, quite close to the churchyard palings, was Sturge's cottage, and if the wind was in the west we always knew what he would have for dinner. It had a marked effect, too, on the service, or rather, on that part of it which was led by the clerk. If it was just the odour of a plain scrag of mutton and turnips that was wafted by on the breeze, the responses led by Sturge went

along at an ordinary jog - trot, while the amens, uttered by the clerk alone, were long-drawn, deep, and sonorous. If it was roasted sheep's-head that scented the church, both of these quickened considerably. But if it was pigs' fry and onions that reached Sturge's nostrils, the responses went along at a gallop, and the amens were cut to a brief 'men, snapped out before the parson had half uttered the closing word of his prayer.

Whenever I went to church, which was not often, I was taken by John. Sarah always went to Zion Chapel in Norencester, never to the Parish Church.

Sometimes I would be taken three or four Sundays in succession, and then some time would elapse without my going there at all. The church-going times always marked the periods in John's life when he was fighting against, and for the moment gaining the mastery of, his passion for drink. How far this was a hereditary taint, and how far he was blamable for thus giving way to it, it is not for me to say, still less is it for me to pass judgment upon his wrecked and blighted life.

As we came out of church, John would sometimes loiter along the gravel path, and gossip with the villagers. The rector, as he left the place accompanied by his wife, would bow to the villagers as he passed, and they would, with lifted finger, touch their caps, while the younger girls would curtsy to his wife.

I remember once, as we were going to church, John running back.

"Forgotten your prayer-book, I suppose," said Sarah.

"No," returned John; "only my birds."

With that remark he went indoors, and came out with a large slice of bread, which he cast about him as he walked along.

"You see, Phil," said he, "while the ground is hard like this they can get nawthin', only berries; and by the end of the winter they are a bit scarce—at least, them as has got any goodness in 'em."

This was John's manna for the birds; and in severe weather it fell daily, but unlike that of old, it was not imbued with strict Sabbatarian principles, it fell alike on week-day and Sunday.

I recall two incidents connected, not with our going in, but with our coming out of church.

Once the rector stopped as he was passing John with a bow, and then, turning back, shook hands with him, a thing he was never known to do with any of the villagers of humble position. Then he drew him aside, and as I followed, I heard him say:

"Fight on, man, fight on; it's hard work, but you will conquer yet."

"John," I said wonderingly, as the rector walked away, "you are not going to fight, are you?"

This advice of the clergyman seemed to me, young as I was, altogether wrong.

"I am allus fightin', Phil," was the sad reply.

"I don't understand you," I answered, looking up into his face.

"You will some day, when you are older," he observed sorrowfully.

The other incident is connected with Maggie Sturge, a girl a few years my senior, who lived in

a cottage next to the church, with her mother and her grandfather, Ben Sturge.

I was talking to her, when Sarah, pointing to us, said :

“Birds of a feather flock together.”

“Leave them alone,” said John quietly. “I know what you insinuate.”

At this moment Ben Sturge and his daughter came up. Said the former :

“John, she won’t curtsy to parson’s wife, the proud little minx.”

“She is getting that proud,” added her mother, “that when she walks in her Sunday best, she struts and swings her tail like a peacock. I said to her the other day : ‘You must mind, Maggie, or that tail will drop off.’ She shan’t have any dinner when she gets home—that she shan’t.”

“Ah, well !” said Sarah, “her pride will have to be broken.”

“Poor, misguided little one!” said John ; “that will be done soon enough. The world will do that.”

“It ought to be done now,” said Sarah. “Maggie, you must curtsy to the parson’s wife.”

The child looked hard at Sarah, and said : “No, I won’t.”

John lifted her in his arms. In an instant a gush of frantic tears came from the child, and she buried her head, half in shame and half in shelter from Sarah’s gaze, on John’s shoulder.

When he had wiped her tears, John said, in that soft, tender voice of his that won the hearts of all children :

“You *will* curtsy to the parson’s wife, Maggie ? ”

And Maggie put her little lips to John's ear, and whispered :

"Yes, for you."

I did not go to church with John many times after this last event. To his great regret, the old rector did not live long, and a new one was presented to the living. Only once did he go to hear the new-comer. For several weeks John had been drinking hard. The Rev. Sherbar, the new rector, had seen him about the village in this degraded, drunken state. He made inquiries, and learnt all he could about John's past ; and how in intervals, when the drink fever was out of him, he came to church. So he prepared a special sermon for his benefit, which he kept underneath the cushion in the pulpit, hoping that John might come. He had chosen for his text, Proverbs xx., 1st verse—"Wine is a mocker, and strong drink is raging" ; and when at last John did appear, he substituted this sermon for the one he had intended to give that day. He was a young man, and doubtless meant well, let me do him that justice ; but he had not learnt in the school of experience that what John needed was not being preached at, but kindly sympathy. John listened to the words, first of blame, and then of exhortation, with cold indifference, and then, as he quitted the church, he said to me : "Phil, I shall never go there again." And he kept his word.

CHAPTER VIII

PAY OR STICK

THERE was only one school in the small town or village, for it was scarcely more, and it was kept by two old maids.

It must have been some distance from our home. The village, I know, was very scattered, the houses being dotted about among the open country much like the plums in Sarah's pudding, few and far between. When it rained, I was given my dinner to take with me to school, which generally consisted of a slice of bread smeared over with dark-looking treacle. On this was placed another slice of bread. A slap was given to cement it firmly to its fellow, and the whole was wrapped in a piece of brown paper.

"You eat that," said Sarah. "Don't make a beast of yourself, and don't forget to say your grace."

If John was at home when I started off to school on a wet day, he would always slip into my hand a penny. With this I bought a stone bottle of ginger beer, and felt I had dined sumptuously.

I suppose I must have been very troublesome at this school, for there was a dunce's cap frequently on my head for tasks ill-done, a corner in which I had frequently to stand with my face to the wall,

and a cane with which I had more than a bowing acquaintance.

I fear I made but little progress there, except in the matter of caning, so John decided to send me to a better school. He had heard of one at Norencester, a town three miles distant.

A carrier's cart went there early every morning, and John arranged for me to ride in it and return at night by the same vehicle. In the first instance, John took me there. I remember sitting behind him on horseback, and holding on by vainly trying to encircle his waist with my arms, or rather, the place where his waist ought to have been.

I think the schoolmaster, Mr. Flintly, had his fees in advance, for I can remember John taking out his large purse from his breeches' pocket and handing over some money.

When John had left, I was called forward and told to stand beside a desk.

Reaching down a book, Mr. Flintly addressed me thus :

"Boy, what is your name?"

"Phil," I answered.

"Phil is no name at all, you mean Philip. Boys," said he, addressing the school, "this is Philip. What Philip is there in Scripture?"

"Philip of Antioch," was the answer, in a chorus of voices.

"What other Philip is there in Scripture?"

Silence from the school.

"Every boy who does not answer this question in five minutes will receive two marks. The answer to be written on a slate here in my presence. Any boy

who tells another the answer will receive twenty marks."

No boy replied, and the whole school was fined.

While he was speaking I looked about me. I noticed on the desk a large Bible, and a missionary box, with the usual slit in the lid.

Turning to me, Mr. Flintly said: "Now, Philip, what is your other name?"

"Please, sir," I answered, "Philip is not my name at all. It's Philman."

"Then how dare you let me tell the school it was Philip. Philman, there are four marks against you. What is your other name, boy?"

"Ditch," I said.

"Ditch," he repeated, with disdain, and he entered them both in his book.

"Now, Ditch, what are you, Episcopalian or Nonconformist?"

"I—I don't know, sir. What is Nonconformist, please?"

"Nonconformity," said he, with a curl of contempt on his lip, "means heresy, it is schism. It comes from the devil and to the devil returns. It is found in little, unconsecrated buildings and tabernacles where fools congregate together, and where, like the breath of a foul drain, it blasts all who inhale it."¹

I cannot say that after this speech I was any nearer understanding what Nonconformity meant, but I made a guess.

"It ain't a pig-stye, is it, sir?" I asked.

¹ The whole of this incident actually occurred in a Suffolk school less than half a century ago.

To my surprise, Mr. Flintly looked pleased. He rubbed his hands, and said :

"That's not a bad definition. It is quite as unwholesome. Now, Ditch," said Mr. Flintly, "now you know what Nonconformist is. What are you ; that or Church? *Here* we have Church"—and he pointed to the end of the school-room nearest him, "there we have Chapel"—and he pointed to the further end.

I understood him clearly now, but I was not quite sure what I was to answer. I had been taken sometimes by John to church, but more often by Sarah to chapel.

"Now, Ditch, speak up," he exclaimed.

"Please, sir," I said, "a little of both."

"You can't be both," he answered severely. "You can't worship God and the devil. Now then, which will you be?"

While I had stood there, I had noticed that the lower, or Chapel end of the school, had bare brick walls, and a bare tiled roof, and the rafters under it were not even painted. The Church end of the school had plaster and paper on its walls, and on these hung some framed texts and a couple of maps. All the woodwork was painted, and the floor was above the level of the Chapel end, into which you descended by two steps. A fire, too, was burning in the grate of the Church end, which looked cheerful on this cold day, whereas the Chapel end had not even a stove. It was not unnatural that I should choose the comfortable end, thus the Church gained an adherent, and I took my seat there. Having done so, I looked about me to observe my surroundings, and more especially my tutor. He was

a short, thick-set, clean-shaven man, and wore a wig of nut-brown, from the bottom of which at the back of his head I noticed that there protruded here and there a few hairs of grizzly grey. I observed, too, that he used a cane very freely, and it was not long before I felt the weight of it. If there was any talking he would make a dash for the region whence it came, and slash out right and left upon our backs as he proceeded down the aisle between our long desks and forms. But his great delight was to give us bad marks, and then add them up at the end of the day. Our names, and their respective totals of bad marks, were read over just before we left of an afternoon. These marks were the grim terror of all the boys, for they had to be reckoned with the next morning at the opening of school, as soon as the amen to the doxology had died away on our lips.

“How will you take it, pay or stick?” was the question put to each boy in turn.

Ten bad marks meant two cuts with the cane ; or it might be evaded by putting a penny in the missionary box on the master’s desk. Twenty bad marks meant five strokes, or twopence for the spiritual elevation of the souls amongst the cocoa-nuts and bread-fruit.

I am afraid I was often a coward, and frequently asked John for coppers ; but sometimes I was ashamed to do so, and had to renew acquaintance with the cane.

When I asked John for money for fines, he would sometimes say : “Do you think he would whack me instead of you if I went to school to-morrow ? Share and share alike, eh, mate ?”

I told John I did not think old Flintly would.

"I don't either," said John. "Well, what is it, Phil? A tuppenny one this time, I suppose."

"No," I said once; "it's threepence."

"Threepence!" exclaimed John, pretending to be very grave and stern—"threepence! Well, you can't mean it!"

"Yes," I said, "I am very sorry."

"You have been going it, Phil. Well, I hope you have had your money's worth. Here it is, then."

I should mention that I noticed this, that those boys whose parents most frequently gave them money to avoid the cane were most often selected to be the recipients of bad marks, while those boys who never paid, but always took the caning, were troubled less than the others.

I can see old Flintly now as vividly as if it were yesterday, whilst I stood before him, holding in one hand the cane, and in the other the box, which he shook as he said:

"Philman Ditch, twenty marks to your debit. How will you take it, pay or stick?"

Other features of my school life yet cling to my memory. I recall a large brass label, almost a foot long, bearing the words *Mea Culpa*. To this was attached a chain, and it was hung on our backs whenever we were found talking. A boy could get relieved of it by finding out another boy doing a similar thing. He merely had to call out his name and hang the label on the talker's back. The master would enter in his book one mark against the talker's name. We had other labels beside the one referred to, but they were of cardboard, and bore such words

as "Disgraced," "Last in sums," "Dirty hands"; but we paid little heed to them, and as their weight was not perceptible, I more than once found myself in the carrier's cart journeying home with the label on my back.

But at length breaking-up day came and we Church boys had cake and wine. The latter, of inferior quality, got into our heads and made them ache. The Chapel boys had biscuits and water, and for once they got the best of it.

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It was a few years after I left school that John was sitting at home one Sunday evening reading the weekly paper.

"I say, Phil," said he, "Flintly won't cane any more boys for a while."

"Why?" I asked.

"He has got seven years for fraudulent embezzlement. I wonder how many of them pennies went to the missionaries!"

CHAPTER IX

THE BOTTLE OF POISON

IN the preceding chapters of childhood's memories, I have covered a period of at least eight years of my life. Some have comparatively little to do with the thread of this story, and serve chiefly to show what a kindly nature John had, and also how, in my early life, my nervous and sensitive nature was often weakened and terrified by the ghastly horrors of religious dogma, so frequently dinned into my childish ears by Sarah, and Luke Shepherd.

I have now to go back a few years, and to record an incident which bears directly on the course of this narrative, in which Fear, ever dominant in my nature, largely influenced my actions.

I was passing through the churchyard one evening alone ; it was getting late, and I was a little nervous. I had been down to the river playing with some boys, whom I had left at the other end of the village. To reach home another way would have meant a longer round by the road ; so I chose the short cut through the fields and churchyard.

It was past the time I was allowed out by Sarah, and I knew that if I were not home quickly she would be waiting to "larrup" me with the cane.

As I passed from the waning light of the open field

into the gloomy pathway, the moon was rising, and cast deep shadows in the churchyard. It was so dark under one wide spreading yew-tree as to be like night, and it made me shudder. In passing under it I saw something move, and heard a noise which caused me to stand still with fright.

"Come here," said a woman's voice.

I was a little relieved to find it was a human being, and not, as I thought, a ghost. But still I was terribly frightened, and approached very slowly.

The woman now moved from under the yew-tree to where there was a better light, and said :

"Now, you know me, don't you?"

The speaker was about thirty years of age, her face was distorted, her eyes wild, and her hair was hanging down rough and dishevelled on her shoulders. Her dress was torn and muddy. I recognised her as being a woman who for the last two or three weeks had been living at Ben Sturge's cottage. I did not know then, but I was told afterwards she was not in her right mind.

"You are the boy that lives with Doctor John," said she, "ain't you?"

I said : "Yes ; I am Phil—Philman Ditch."

"I thought you would come back this way. Come nearer."

I moved closer to her, but was very fearful. She laid a hand on my shoulder—a rough, coarse hand—with long nails, that must have been uncut for months.

"Doctor John goes into that medicine room of his every morning, don't he?"

"Yes," I said ; "before he starts on his rounds."

"And you go in there sometimes? Now, you needn't say you don't, because I have seen you. I can see the bottles in the little side window from the road. There is a large one there with a small label I would like tew suck. Can you read?" asked the woman.

"A little," I answered.

"Do you know what p-o-i-s-o-n spells?"

"Why, poison," said I. "That's what they kill rats with, ain't it?"

"I want tew kill a rat," the woman hissed out—"a big, ugly female rat."

"You try a red herrin'," said I. "That's what John does. Put gloves on your hands when you handle the trap, and smear it all over with the herrin'. You catch them alive then; it's better fun."

"Listen!" said the woman, without seeming to hear me. "You have seen some bottles in that room—small ones?"

"Lots of 'em," I said.

"With poison on the label?"

"Yes," I answered.

"One of them will dew for the rat," she said, and burst into shrill laughter. "Lor! won't that rat suck it? It's lovely! You must bring me one of those small bottles full. You have got a little pocket here, haven't you?" and she touched my jacket.

"Yes," I said, showing it. I was rather proud to do so.

"You have tew put one of those bottles, with a poison label—and full, mind—in your pocket, and bring it to me for my rat."

"I shall have to ask John for it," I said.

"You must dew it without," said the woman, clutching me fiercely.

"Oh, I couldn't," I said. "That would be stealing."

"Hush!" said she. "You hear that noise. Dew you see that white tombstone there, and that dark thing creeping behind it?"

"No," I said.

"Not that?" and she pointed to a dark shadow.

I looked and was terrified. Whether it was only her shadow, or my own cast by the rising moon, or nothing at all, I know not.

"That's a ghost," said she. "It follows me everywhere. I have but tew beckon it, and it will take you away, and it shall, unless you bring me here to-morrow morning that poison bottle for the rat." The last two words she hissed out. "Now run home fast, or that ghost will have you, and don't breathe a word tew anyone, or it will come tew you in the night."

When I got home I looked very white.

"What's come to Phil?" said John, looking at me. "He fare to look as white as a ghost."

"Been stuffin' too much," said Sarah. "He shall have some senna tea when he goes to bed to-night."

Senna tea was Sarah's one sovereign remedy for all complaints for juveniles or adults.

"Rubbish!" said John. "The poor little chap don't want senna."

"The boy is not a horse, nor he ain't a cow," said Sarah; "and you don't know nothin' about him."

What with the senna, and the fear of the ghost, and the having to do something in the morning which I knew was wrong—stealing something from dear old John—I had a terrible night, and slept but little, and when I did, I dreamt of the horrible woman in the churchyard.

“Phil don’t look mighty well this morning,” observed John, eying me. “What is it, old chap? Keep your pecker up. If you get queer, I must, you know. Share and share alike, we allus say, don’t us, Phil?”

But I could not tell John anything, and I was feeling too upset to eat my breakfast.

“He don’t look over-grand, do he?” observed John, a little later. “I know,” he said, “it’s that blarmed senna. You come a’long’er me arter breakfast into the medicine shop, and we’ll soon put that stuff right. Sarah, don’t you give him any more of it,” he added, turning to her; “you think boys’ guts is like dirty chimneys, allus wanting the sweep.”

After breakfast, we entered the medicine shop.

“Let’s look at your tongue, old chap,” said John. I put it out for his inspection. “Not bad,” he exclaimed. “Can’t make you out.”

I looked round, and there, just above my head, was a little bottle marked “Poison,” which was full. How could I get it without John seeing me? I thought a minute, and then Cunning came to the aid of Fear.

“Look up there, John,” I said. “What a big wasp that is; never seen such a big ‘un.”

“Where, Phil? I don’t see it. They don’t often

get in here. The smell don't agree with their innards, I'm thinkin'," he said.

"There, it's gone now—flown out of the top of that window," I said, and while he was looking, I had snatched the bottle and hid it in my pocket.

I made some excuse and left John, and soon ran down to the churchyard. There was the woman waiting for me. She was sitting on a grave. If she looked haggard, wild, and unkempt in the partial darkness of the previous evening, she looked doubly so now in the glare of the sunlight. She snatched the bottle from me, and shrieked out:

"Now for the rat—the rat!" Then she turned fiercely to me, and said: "Go; I'm going tew kill the rat—the rat!"

It was about two or three days after this we were all three seated around the fire—it must have been about seven in the evening. I was sitting on my little stool, trying to read a book that John had bought me. I was making but little progress, for I had to keep moving the book to and fro to dodge the shadow cast by Sarah's arm as it went to and fro as she sat sewing, her position being between me and the lighted candle.

"Where was I born, John?" I asked, looking up from my book.

"I think you growed," answered John.

"In a ditch," snapped out Sarah, "all along of the stinging nettles; and it's a pity John didn't leave you there."

"But I wasn't born there, was I?" I asked.

"No one knows where you was born," said Sarah; "more shame to them."

"Now, then," remarked John, "none a' that. It's a subject what'll keep."

"Who was my father?" I asked.

"Ah! you may well ask that," said Sarah.

"And mother?" I continued.

"That's it. You go on, stick to it, like a terrier does to a rat, and then you will know everything," said Sarah. "It's all told in one word, shame; s-h-a-m-e. There now, you have got it."

"Maggie Sturge doesn't know where she was born, either," I remarked.

Maggie and I had been talking earlier in the day, and somewhat curiously had touched on this subject, only to discover that beyond that she had a mother living now, she knew, like me, nothing of her father, or even where she was born.

"I say, Phil, old chap, you've got the inquisitive stop on to-night, ain't yer? You know what stops are; them things they pulls out beside the organ which make it squeak like a flute, or boom like a threshing-machine. You just wait until you are a bit older afore you put that stop on. As long as you is kep' well—and you are, ain't yer?—or anyone," said John, waving his hand, "is kep' well, it don't fare to matter a mighty deal if he was hulled out of a muck-heap or born in a palace; it ain't worth a blarmed thowt!"

While he was speaking there was a knock at the door. Sarah opened it and let in, to my great surprise, the village constable and two other men in uniform. One was evidently an Inspector of police, and he did the talking for the three. He knew John well, for he had often been to the

Norencester Police Station to attend to horses, and it was from there I subsequently found they came.

John motioned all three to be seated.

"What's wrong?" he asked, and waited for them to speak.

The Inspector produced from his pocket a little bottle, which I instantly recognised as the one I had stolen.

"This," said the Inspector, "has been found in Doley's Wood, near Norencester, near the body of a woman found dead. This bottle," he said, "we trace to you. Can you explain how it came into the possession of this woman?"

"No," said John, "I can't."

"You prefer not to answer questions. Well, perhaps that is wise. It may be my painful duty to arrest you, and then anything you say will be used in evidence against you."

"Arrest me!" said John, in surprise. "I know nothing whatever about it. I am quite innocent."

"I don't say as you are not. Will you answer questions? Please yourself; you are not under arrest yet, or I should not ask you any."

"I will answer anything," said John. "I don't care whether used in evidence against me or not."

"I am glad to hear it," returned the Inspector. "Now, did you ever sell, or give this woman—Sturge, we find to be her name—this bottle of poison, or can you tell me how it got into her possession? You keep your dispensary locked?"

"Allus; and the key in my pocket," said John decisively. "I can throw no light upon it, mate."

John looked at the bottle critically, uncorked the bottle, smelt the contents, then handed it back to the Inspector.

"I think that bottle was in my medicine shop quite recently; I might almost say a few days ago."

The Inspector took out his note-book and entered John's remark.

"Anything else to say?" he said. "Mind, you please yourself."

"No, I can't say as there is; leastwise, as I can think on."

"Well," said the Inspector, as he got up to leave, "we shall see what the coroner's jury say to it. You will be wanted at the inquest as a witness, I expect. If anything else comes to light, just let me know, will you?"

I had listened to all this conversation in terror, and I was horrified to find that suspicion of murder seemed to fall on my dear old John. I don't know how I summoned up courage to do it, but all in a moment, I ran forward and caught hold of the Inspector's coat, and said:

"Stop! I can tell you all about that bottle."

The Inspector looked at me in surprise, came back, sat down, took his cap off, and scratched his head wonderingly.

"Well, little 'un, what do you know?"

With much hesitancy and shame I blurted out the whole story, and then I turned to John, and begged him to beat me.

"Do you know, boy, this is very serious? You might have hung the Doctor if you hadn't spoke up.

If you was my boy, I should wring your neck. That's what I should do to you. You're a little devil."

With this remark, the Inspector entered my name in his book, saying as he did so to John :

"You give it that boy hot; many a man has swung with less evidence. When you take the woman's history, the illegitimate child she has had, her having been here out of her mind at times, you having got an illegitimate boy here, I tell you it did look black against you. My theory was she was worrying you for money, that you gave her the poison knowing as she was out of her mind, and persuaded her to take it—that would be murder, you know. I came here quite prepared to arrest you. But when I looked at your face—now I can read any face, I reckon, as well as a judge and jury—and put a few questions, I soon made up my mind. 'Innocent,' says I. 'Innocent.' You know how a terrier smells out a rat? That's how I scent crime, but I didn't scent it here."

All this while John had not said a word to me, and I felt it more than if he had beaten me.

As the Inspector left the cottage, Sarah said : "That's what comes of bringing home bastards."

I went up to John and said how deeply sorry I was, and begged his forgiveness. I shall never forget the look he gave me. There was no anger in it. I wished there had been. I should have felt it less. There was sorrow in it—sorrow for me, that I was no better, and had so deceived him.

"There wasn't no wasp in the room then, Phil?" he said at length.

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"No," I answered, holding down my head with shame.

"Oh, Phil! Phil! How could you do it? And we was such mates, weren't us, and—"

But here John's voice grew husky. He stopped speaking, and walked out into the dark street.

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When I came down the next morning after a night of bad dreams, Sarah said to me :

"I don't know what's come of John; he didn't come home last night. I expect he has been soddin' again."

"Shall I go and look for him?" I asked.

"No," exclaimed Sarah. "He will come home when the drink is out of his legs, not before."

I did not obey her, however. Directly breakfast was finished, I hurried off to look for John. I searched all the main roads and by-lanes, but to no purpose. I was about to give up the task, when it occurred to me to look in Holden's Wood. There was a soft bank there, and I had sometime seen John rest against it and smoke a pipe. I ran across the road, got through the stile, instead of over it, as being quicker, and made my way towards the wood. When I reached it I saw a young man, not more than twenty or twenty-one, dressed in clerical clothes, standing and looking at something at his feet. What he looked at was hidden from my view by high grass. When I reached him I found the something was John, and that he was asleep.

The young man looked at me. It was the kindest and most beautiful face I had ever seen. John's face

was kind, but at this time it was coarsened with drink. The young man's expression was sad and grave—unusually so for one so young. I think the sight of the man at his feet had saddened him, for turning to me, he said :

“Is this Doctor John?”

I replied that it was.

“I thought so,” he said. “I stayed last night with my uncle, whom you know as Squire Benthorne. He was telling me all about him, and pointed him out as we were walking yesterday. A sad mixture of saint and sinner,” he said to himself musingly. “I am going to wake him and talk to him.”

I recall this scene now as vividly as if it had occurred but yesterday. The pale, grave face and slight figure of the young clergyman, clad in his sombre black, bending over the red-brown figure on the grassy slope, and moving him as gently as one would a sleeping child.

“That won't wake him,” I said, and I knelt down and shouted in his ear: “Sarah says it's time to get up.”

Very slowly John opened his eyes, and at length realised that someone other than myself stood beside him.

“A blarmed parson!” he exclaimed, in tones of disgust.

“Yes; a blarmed parson,” answered the stranger, and a bright smile lit up his face. But it fled in a moment as he looked again at the man at his feet.

“What are you doing here?” asked the stranger.

“That is just what I want to know,” remarked

Doctor John. "I don't in the least know how I came here. It's very certain I did not have many stairs to climb when I went to bed last night. That's all I know about it."

"You mean to say you have been here all night?"

"Well, it looks rather like it, and it's a cheap bed, too; and you can't call the bedroom stuffy, can you?"

"You were drunk last night, I suppose," remarked the stranger, in sad tones.

"I was," was the laconic answer.

"My friend," said the stranger kindly, "I am sorry for you."

"Sorry for me! Why? I drunk the liquor myself. I had the very devil in me last night, you know."

"And I should like to try and help drive that devil out of you," said the stranger earnestly.

Doctor John got up from the ground and stood upright, but not very steadily. The stranger drew his arm through his, and walked along with him.

"You are a parson," said John, looking at him critically, "as regards your clothes, but you don't talk like one, or at least not like most of 'em."

"Can't you do better than this, my friend?" said the stranger kindly. "There must be someone whom you care for, and who cares for you, and who would be grieved if they saw you thus. What about this little fellow here? Don't you care for him?"

"What do you think, Phil? We are mates, old chap, ain't we?"

"He is very kind to me," I answered stoutly.

"And you love his bright eyes, now, don't you?" asked the stranger.

"That I do, man," said John, but in a sad tone.

In a moment all his light banter had vanished. The young cleric saw that he had touched the right cord in the man's heart, and he played upon it skilfully.

"Try for the sake of this little chap here to do something better," he urged.

"Try! I am always trying," answered John sadly, "and I fail, and then I get so that I don't care. What did the last parson tell me, but that every time I failed I was a step nearer Hell. I reckon I am pretty well there now."

"You are a step nearer Heaven," said the stranger solemnly.

"What!" exclaimed John, with surprise.

"I mean what I say. You are a step nearer Heaven. You would never have failed had there been no effort to climb. Try again; and if you fail, you can well leave that to God's mercy. But you may not fail. Try! Try! Try!"

The man's deep sympathy, his earnestness, and his sincerity, all sank into John's heart. John was a man you could not move by fear or threat, but you might lead him with kindly sympathy.

"Well, there is one thing," said John, "you don't preach at me, and that in itself is something in your favour."

"I preach at you? God forbid! Perhaps if I had your passion implanted in my nature, I might be no better than you are."

"You could not well be much worse than I have been lately," answered John sadly.

"I am sorry for you—deeply sorry for you. I wish I lived near you, but I don't. Now I want you, just for the sake of this little fellow here, to try and put a foot again on the bottom rung of the ladder and climb upward, and see how high you can get by the time I come again. What is this little fellow's name?"

"Phil," I said.

"Now, try for the sake of Phil, for one year," pleaded the stranger earnestly.

"Oh, do, John, please," I said. I was now growing old enough to understand his disgrace.

"I shall be here again next year," he added. "For a year, then. Let us shake hands on it."

John was silent for a moment, then he said, very solemnly: "I'll try. What is your name?"

"Ernest Venner," was the answer.

The stranger shook hands and left. He had not gone very far when he called me to him, and feeling in his pocket, gave me a shilling.

"Keep with him all you can," he said, "and most especially so at night-time. He is fond of you. Try and help him for his good."

I remembered what he said. I kept close to John and gave up my play to keep with him of an evening, and often when I found his steps were wending their way towards the "Red Lion," I put my hand in his, saying: "Let's go home, and you tell me some stories."

"Well, you are a chap for stories, Phil. You are

never satisfied. I have told you all I know, little mate."

"Let's have them over again," I said, keeping tight hold of his hand the while.

"All right, old chap," said John smilingly ; and then suffered me to lead him home.

CHAPTER X

A N A C C I D E N T

WE were sitting one day at dinner, and John had just said his simple, earnest, and informal grace, "I wish every poor man had as good a dinner as I have," a remark not always made, but often thought, and always felt, when I heard the tramp of horses in the road, and then the sound seemed to stop suddenly with a dull thud, and a splattering of hoofs on the ground.

"Something is wrong, I fancy," remarked John. "I will go and see what it is. Come on, Phil."

The sound we had heard was that of a carriage and pair. There was a coachman on the box, and two men in the carriage; one was big and coarse-featured, between forty and fifty years of age, the other a much younger man. There had been an accident. One of the horses had fallen down suddenly, and it had been dragged along some little distance by the collar before the coachman could stop the vehicle. I think the man was urging the horse to get up, assuming it had only stumbled, for he was beating its thigh with the butt-end of his whip.

"No, no," cried John; "don't do that. Look at its mouth, man! Can't you see it's in a fit?"

"Fit, is it?" said the occupant of the carriage, getting out very leisurely. "How do you know that?"

"Well," answered John, with a smile, "how do I know my A.B.C.? I've been taught it. How do I know when a horse is in a fit? Why, I've been taught it. I have not been a horse doctor for ten years without knowing that."

"A horse doctor!" repeated the stranger. "Do you think you can do anything with it?" pointing to the fallen animal.

"That is just as you wish," answered John. "If I do the job, I do it alone, without the help of that man of yours. Kicking the horse's ribs won't cure a fit."

"Well, horse doctor, take over the job. Do what you can. I have an important engagement to attend to ten miles from here."

By this time a crowd of villagers, both adults and children, had gathered round; but John cleared them back to give the poor dumb brute more breathing room. Then he quickly ran into his cottage, coming back with water and something in a bottle from his dispensary.

While he was attending to the horse, someone, I think it was Ben Sturge, called out, "Maggie!"

"Which Maggie do you want?" asked the landlord of the "Red Lion," who had strolled up to join the group. "I can see no less than three Maggies here."

"Why, *my* Maggie, of course," said Sturge, coming across the road.

"Here, Maggie Sturge, your grandfather wants

you," said the landlord, addressing my Maggie, the one who had refused to curtsy to the parson.

As the landlord said "Maggie Sturge," I saw the gentleman from the carriage looked quickly round. When the young girl crossed the road to her grandfather, he followed her with his eyes. Evidently something occurred to him, for he went up to her, saying :

"Maggie, I want to speak to you a minute. Come here."

She left her grandfather, and came to him, standing in front of him half shyly, but blushing and looking very pretty.

"How old are you?" asked the gentleman.

"Eleven last April," answered Maggie.

"Where is your mother?"

"Over there," answered Maggie.

"And your father?"

"Dead," was the answer.

"Did you ever see your father?" asked the gentleman, with an air of indifference.

"No," replied Maggie. "I wish I had. Oh, I should have loved him so!"

"Would you," he said, with a sigh that I thought sounded like a sigh of regret; "and your name is Sturge?"

"Yes; Maggie Sturge."

"Where were you born?" asked the strange gentleman, turning his back on me, and closely scrutinising Maggie's face.

"I don't know," answered Maggie.

"I don't either," I said.

"It was a long way off here," continued Maggie.
"Ever so far away."

"By the way, what was your father's name?" asked the stranger.

"Why, Sturge," answered Maggie, with surprise.

"Ah, yes ; but his Christian name?"

"I don't know," said Maggie. "Mother never speaks of him."

I noticed that although he asked all these questions of Maggie, he never asked one of me, though I had gone up to him and stood near Maggie all the time.

"Where do you live ?" he asked.

"Over there," answered Maggie, pointing to her cottage next to the church.

"And I live over there," I answered, pointing to mine.

"I did not ask where you live. You can run away," he answered, addressing me.

But I did not. I just went a few yards away, and waited for Maggie.

I heard him say : "Hold up your face. Now," he continued, "shut your eyes, and open your hands."

He placed something in them, and walked away.

When Maggie joined me, she showed me what it was. It was a bright halfpenny—at least, so I thought, and so did Maggie, and I thought he ought at least to have given her sixpence. A halfpenny was so mean, and almost insulting, and so Maggie felt.

Just as she came to me, John said to the stranger :

"Well, I think it will be safe to drive on now, but slowly—mind."

"Very good! What is your fee? Not much, I hope, for so short a time, and so little physic."

"I don't charge for time and drugs only," answered John, somewhat annoyed. "I charge for skill, and I have given your horse the best I have. I can't weigh the latter out like sugar, nor charge the former by the hour like a bricklayer's labourer. My fee is five shillin's."

"What? Five shillings for that? It's very dear compared to what I pay in London."

"In London," said John, with a touch of scorn. "Them 'vets' would have killed your horse for half the money."

"Look here," said the stranger, "we don't want to argue and fall out. Let us split it; say half-a-crown," and he tendered John the coin.

"No," answered John; "five shillin's, please."

"But you wouldn't charge a farmer five shillings," returned the stranger. "It's absurd."

"No," replied John; "that is quite right. I charge according to how a man is off. I know your house; you live at the Mansion, Rushmere, and five shillin's is the lowest. I might have done the same for a poor man for sixpence, but that's nothin' to do with you."

"You refuse half-a-crown?"

"I do," was the firm answer.

"Drive on!" cried the stranger to his coachman, and he got into his carriage.

But it was not so easy to drive on, for John had sprang to the horses' heads, caught hold of

the reins, and backed the carriage towards the ditch.

"Stan' out of the way, or I will drive over yer!" called out the stranger.

In moments of excitement he often drifted into an old dialect of the country where he spent his early years, which, in his ten years of absence and contact with the world, he had not altogether lost.

The stranger leant forward, took the whip from the coachman, and made a cut at John's head, but only one. The next instant, John let go of the horses, climbed into the carriage, and dragged the stranger out, both of them narrowly escaping a fall under the wheels. It was the work of a moment for John to gain his feet. There was some scuffling and wrestling and exchange of blows, and I could not see quite what was happening; but in the end I saw the stranger lying flat on his back in the road, and John kneeling on his chest. I heard him say: "Now, then, will you pay my fee? It's five shillin's."

The only answer the stranger made was to call for his man to come and help him. The coachman—the one who had struck the horse on the ground with his whip—came to his master's assistance. On seeing him, John sprang to his feet, and crying, "What! the two of yur," pulled off his coat in an instant, and before the coachman could realise it, he was on his back too, on the top of his master.

"You can't say but what I've give yur a soft cushion to lie on," said John, as he looked at the man. "Now, have you had enough, or will yur get

up and have some more? I am ready and quite willin'."

The coachman scrambled to his feet, but did not seem at all disposed to have "some more," and walked away growling and swearing.

John turned to the stranger and helped him to rise.

"Now, let's see," he said; "any bones broken? You are too fat to go in for this sort of amusement, you know. Before you go in for drivin' over people just as you like, you will have to go in for trainin'. A little more of this," he said, placing his hand on his muscle of iron, "and a little less of that porpoise affair," pointing to the stranger's corpulent stomach. "As for the five shillin's," he continued, "you can keep it; it'll do for your doctor's bill. You will want one when you get home. I'm blarmed if I haven't given you a shakin' and a bruisin' you won't soon forget."

With this remark he walked away, and left the stranger to limp to his carriage.

"I shall report you to the police as a dangerous ruffian," the stranger called out, as he drove away. "You will find yourself arrested to-night."

"Right you are; they know where to look for me, Doctor John, of Burstone, the fellow what doctors their horses."

As I heard the sound of the departing carriage, Ben Sturge came running across the road.

"I say," he cried, "there is a mistake! That man has given Maggie a sovereign in mistake for a halfpenny."

"Has he?" cried John. "Well, I am glad. It

serves the skunk right." But afterwards he said :
" No ; don't change that, Maggie. Keep it and
give it to him back if he ever come this way again.
He is a mean bully, and a coward, but right is right,
you know."

CHAPTER XI

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR

ONE autumn morning, Ben Sturge, who, as I have previously mentioned, was sexton as well as carpenter and wheelwright, was digging a grave.

"There, she will lie comfortable in that," he said to me, as he clambered out of the grave. "If she go any deeper, she will go to water."

His daughter, the mother of little Maggie, my playmate, had been killed by a threshing-machine. She had been watching it, and having ventured too near, was caught by the driving belt, drawn to the descending piston-rod of the engine, and instantly killed.

Ben Sturge and I walked back to the village green together. As we neared it, we met John, who said to me:

"Look at that woman coming along the road. She is begging. I remember her face, and yet I can't think who she is. I giv' her a copper as I came along. See! she is coming over here."

As he spoke, the woman approached us, and addressing John, said: "I thought I knew you," in a somewhat indifferent tone.

"I don't know who you are," answered John,

"although your face is familiar. I have seen you somewhere. Who are you?"

"How did you like that baby I gave you ten year ago? You were having a good snore then, and your arm was stretched out just ready for it."

"Yes; I remember you now," he said. "You slept that night at the 'Red Lion,' and you giv' me your baby in the mornin'."

"Yes; and now I want him back. That's him, I expect," pointing to me. "He looks about ten. Come here, dear," and she beckoned me.

"Yes," said John, "that is your child; but if you expect him to have any love for you, I think you have made a great mistake. A bitch after six months has none for its puppies, nor the puppies for their mother. But you are even lower than the animal, it never deserts its young. How did you know," he continued, "that I had a little more love for your child than you had?"

"When a woman can stand at a bar," she replied, "and get a drink, there are always plenty of fools in a country inn to tell you anything you want to know. It did not take me long to find out about my boy. I am his mother, and I want him back."

"You could not support him; you are begging."

"As good a trade as any other, and his little face is just the one to fetch the coppers, and the sixpences too, out of the women's pockets. I want him, and what is more, I am going to have him, unless you make it worth my while."

"You want money?" asked John quietly.

"Yes," answered the woman; "and I mean to have it."

"And you won't go without it?"

"Not without the boy," she answered firmly.

"Well, we will see about that. Do you see that man standin' over there with arms folded as though he had nawthin' to do? Well, I shall giv' him something to do. It's our village policeman, and he has not had a job lately."

"What! not run *you* in for being drunk?" said the woman.

"No; he has not even had that honour," replied John.

"Well, what about him?" she said.

"I shall giv' him the job of takin' you to the Police Station on the charge of desertin' your child."

"Well, I suppose you have won the trick. I never thought of that," she said sullenly, but with manifest uneasiness.

"You can just turn it all over in your mind," answered John quietly.

"But you will give me something just to go and drink his health. It is not every day a woman sees her child after an absence of ten years."

"I think you have had quite enough already," John replied. "I shall not giv' you a penny."

"What is your name?" asked the woman, turning to me.

"Phil," I said.

"Good-bye, Phil! Your mammy will come and see you again soon, when your new father is in a better temper."

So saying, the wretched, half-drunken, and be-draggled wretch went slowly away, drifting aimlessly down the road, a piteous and unforgettable sight.

This, then, was my mother !

John was quiet after this for some time ; at length he said to me : " You are old enough to know who that is, Phil."

" Yes," I answered, with feelings of abhorrence.

" I should never speak of her to anyone," he said, " if I were you."

" No," I answered. " And you won't let her have me, will you ?"

" Never fear that, Phil," he replied emphatically.

As I walked by his side, I said : " John, may I ask you a question ?"

" Certainly," he said. " What is it ?"

" Do you know who my father is ?"

" No ; I have not the slightest idea. Would *you* like to know ? Do you want a father ?" he asked, with, I thought, just a touch of regret in his voice.

" No," I answered ; " not while I have you. And you wouldn't let one take me if he came, would you ?"

" No," answered John, almost fiercely ; " no one shall take you from me. Yur my little mate, and we are a-goin' to stick together."

I opened the chapter by speaking of the grave then being dug for Maggie's mother. She had lost a parent, while I had found mine ; but I felt very sad about it, and would have far sooner that someone could have pointed to one of those green graves and said : " That is your mother."

My little playfellow, Maggie—I call her " little" perhaps here more as a term of endearment, for she was an inch taller than myself and a few years my senior—was very grieved at the loss of her mother.

So was Ben Sturge, though, from the way he spoke of it, you would almost think he was lacking in feeling.

"My poor girl," he said, "got mixed up along of a threshing-machine, and the machine got the best of it. She would have been here now if it had not been for that."

She had been chief bread-winner at Sturge's little cottage; in the rearing of fowls and in fine plaiting she had no equal in the village.

For some time past Sturge had been getting infirm and crabbed with rheumatism; his thin little body seemed also to be shrinking away. If anyone asked him how he was, he would say: "There arn't much on me left to be anything at all; but what there is, is good enough for the worms."

The latter had not long to wait for their feast. The sudden death of his daughter hastened his end, and within one month of her decease he went also. Thus Maggie was left alone in the world, without father or mother or any relation that she knew of.

John had nursed the old man during the last few days of his life, and had sat up with him several nights. There were two things that seemed greatly to trouble him. One, quite a trivial matter, was that he had forgotten to take a clean surplice to the vestry (his late daughter had always washed them), the other was Maggie.

"What will become of Maggie when I am gone?" said Sturge, half raising himself in the bed.

"That poor little varmint won't be without a home," answered John quietly. "The Lord will take care of her."

There was no irreverent cant in John's remark. It was not made, either, in that spirit of easy-going conventionality with which we seek to give consolation to others by casting all the burden on the Lord, instead of helping to bear its weight ourselves. He uttered the words in all sincerity and reverence. Sturge understood him, and held out his hand to John, who clasped it firmly in his; but neither spoke just then.

After a while, the old man said:

"There's my Bible in my desk at the church. I'd like Maggie to have that. You take care of it, and give it her when she's a woman."

"I'll go to the church in the mornin' and get it," said John, "and I'll lock it up in the medicine shop along of the pills. They won't hurt it, but the rats may."

"You wrap it up in camphor, and put it in a drawer. That will be all right," answered the old man.

The last time John saw Sturge was a Sunday morning. The bells were being rung for church by a new bell-ringer. Sturge heard them.

"He don't ring that foot bell," said Sturge, "as if he'd got a scrap of muscle in his leg. Let me get up and do it. I can't bear to hear them bells rung like that." So saying, he tried to get out of bed.

"No, no," said John; "lie still."

But John's words were quite unnecessary, for as he spoke, Sturge fell back and quietly passed away.

John took Maggie to live with us. I had expected much opposition from Sarah, but to my great surprise she made none.

It was only in the periods when the "drinking fever"—I must call it so, for want of a better name—was on him that she dare nag at him, and lately he had seemed to be gaining the upper hand of his passion for drink in a marked manner.

When John brought Maggie to our cottage, he simply said to Sarah: "Here is another poor little varmint; receive her for the sake of the Name you reverence."

Sarah merely answered: "Humph! I shall have to make her some black, and I hate doing black; it tries my eyes."

"Can't I help?" observed Maggie. "Mother used to say I was good at my needle. Do let me try, please."

"We will see," answered Sarah, somewhat snappishly. "Get the tea ready."

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A day or two after Sturge's funeral, the following conversation took place on the village green:

"So you have got another bastard," observed Jim Hardman to John. "You will soon have a sort of Foundling Hospital all of your own."

"You are good at casting slurs on young children," answered John; "almost as much at home at it as at shoeing a mare. Comes sort of natural to you, don't it?"

"No offence, no offence," said the blacksmith; "only black is black, you know. Talking about that Maggie of yours," continued the blacksmith, "we never could make anything out of it. Sturge was wonderfully close."

"He was close," observed the Red Lion, who had by now strolled up.

"Couldn't get nawthin' out o' he," observed the blacksmith. "All he would say were: 'My girl's husband is dead.'"

"I don't believe she ever had one, either," said the landlord. "'Married a cousin the name of Sturge?' Don't believe it. What did Sturge say as his daughter's husband were like? Nawthin'. What did Sturge say as to what trade he were? Nawthin'. Where did he live? He didn't remember. And what did he die of? He don't remember either. That's all we have been able to get out of he all these years, and yet he expected us to believe as Maggie were born in wedlock."

"I asked him about her the other day afore he died," remarked Hardman. "All he said was: 'Her mother went away of her own accord, and she came back of her own accord, and that is all I know about it.'"

CHAPTER XII

THE UNKNOWN CLIENT

A LIGHT cart was proceeding at a fast pace along a narrow road which led to Burstone. There were two men in it. One a dried-up-looking man of fifty or sixty, the other a younger man, who was driving.

They were talking as they drove along, discussing the local politics of Norencester, and taking opposite views about a forthcoming election. The elder man was getting heated with the debate, and seemed to come out of his usual reticent self, for he wound up by saying, very forcibly :

"That will never take place," and he added irritably : "Don't disagree with me."

"No, sir; only I would just add that that is what the cannibal said to the missionary when he quarrelled with him and ate him: 'Don't disagree with me.'"

It was a stale, hackneyed joke, and the old gentleman tried to look annoyed; but as the young man by his side made this observation with the utmost gravity, and then subsided into a respectful silence, his face relaxed, and he checked the reproof that sprang to his lips, and merely coughed a slight cough of annoyance. Nothing further was

said until they had reached the village, when the man who was driving quietly observed :

"It was somewhere about here, sir."

"I don't want to know *about*," answered the elder man, whose name was James Nettleby. "I want to know the exact spot."

The younger man having made some further humorous remark, the elder testily exclaimed :

"I don't want any of your observations. Just do as you are told ; point me out the exact spot where it happened. I will take it for granted that you have a ready wit."

"Been in our family for years, sir. Grandfather left it to me in his will."

Mr. Nettleby's face was again divided between a frown and a smile ; but the smile, after a hard tussle, gained the day.

"It was a legacy free of probate," said Mr. Nettleby, who could not resist the temptation of making a smart answer. "But just point out the exact spot where the horse fell."

Reuben Starkham, the man who was driving, got out of his cart, and walked a few paces down the road. Then he called out :

"Here it is, sir, exact to a yard. That's where Jim kicked the mare when it was on the ground. That's where she lay and grazed the back of her leg against the shaft ; and here's where Mr. Grainger stood while the horse doctor was attending to the poor mare."

Mr. Nettleby walked close up to the man.

"Then I should say, from his description," he muttered half audibly, "it must be over there."

"What's over there?" asked Reuben.

"A very fine chestnut tree," observed Mr. Nettleby.

But Mr. Nettleby did not mean a tree at all. He felt he had been lacking in caution in thus thinking out loud, so he merely said this to mislead Reuben Starkham. Mr. Nettleby was a very wily, prudent old man.

Turning to Starkham, he said: "I think we passed a public-house a little way up the road."

"Yes, sir; the 'Red Lion.'"

"Well, drive up there now, and wait for me. I will join you there presently."

Mr. Nettleby then sat down on a large trunk of a tree lying on the strip of green at the roadside, and waited till the man was out of sight. Then he crossed the road, and opening the gate of the cottage where Ben Sturge once lived, he knocked softly at the door. There was no answer. Whereupon Mr. Nettleby knocked a little louder. Still no answer. He knocked louder still, then looked in at the window, and muttered: "Why, dear me, the cottage is empty." He then retraced his steps, and closed the gate behind him. As he did so, a man stopped and looked hard at him.

It was Doctor John, who said, with a smile: "He doesn't live there now."

"Doesn't he?" said Mr. Nettleby. "Perhaps you could tell me where he has gone to?"

"Rather a long way off," answered Doctor John.

"Dear, dear! that's annoying," observed Mr. Nettleby. "Can you give me his address?"

"He didn't leave one," answered John, with a smile.

"Gone, and no address ; dear, dear ! And you don't know where he has gone to ?"

"Well," said John, "there are some who pretend to, but I would sooner say his address is unknown."

The matter-of-fact, dry Mr. Nettleby utterly failed to grasp Doctor John's meaning.

"Who are those who pretend to know his address ?" asked Mr. Nettleby. "Where do they live ?"

"In this parish some say he has gone to Heaven, but others quite another place."

"Dear, dear !" said Mr. Nettleby ; "how you shock me ! You mean the man is dead. Why didn't you say so ?"

"I thought I did," answered Doctor John, "very plainly. If you couldn't see it, don't blame me."

"But I do blame you," said Mr. Nettleby, annoyed, "for such profanity."

"All right ; you will feel better presently. Good morning !" and Doctor John walked away.

"Stop !" cried Mr. Nettleby. "I want to ask you a question or two ; but do please give me a straightforward answer. Don't talk in enigmas."

"Talk like a lawyer, you mean ?" said John, with a smile.

"How do you know I am a lawyer ?"

"Pale face, clothes, speech, manner, all show it."

"Well, you are not far out. Now, just answer me one question. Had this man any boy living with him ?"

"No," answered Doctor John, "a girl."

"Girl, was it ? Ah, yes ; I had quite forgotten. Well, where is she now ? Not gone and left no

address behind like her father?" added Mr. Nettleby with a laugh.

"She is living with me," answered Doctor John simply.

"What is her name?" asked Mr. Nettleby.

"Maggie," was the answer.

The questioner took out a pocket-book, and referred to it. "And her surname?" he asked.

"Sturge," answered John.

"I suppose you spell it S-t-e-r-g-e?"

"No, I don't," answered John. "You can if you like."

"What is her age?" asked Mr. Nettleby.

"Thirteen, I should think," said Doctor John. "Perhaps fourteen."

"Well, I want to see her."

"Do you? Well, as you have been so very free in your questions, you will first have to answer a few of mine, and the first is: What do you want with her? Now, then, straight, man. Look me in the face, a straightforward answer, or you will have to knock me down before you even speak to her."

"I—I don't want to do that," said Mr. Nettleby. "I fear I should have rather a difficult task if I did. The—the fact is I am here on legal business. I am a lawyer, as you guessed."

"I thought that was about the cut of you," answered Doctor John. "But I can't say as that is any recommendation to me."

"We need not discuss that question," said Mr. Nettleby stiffly, "but just get to business. My client—"

"Who is your client?" asked Doctor John.

"That I must not disclose."

"Is your client a man or woman?"

"Really, now, I would much rather not say. It has no bearing on the case at all. My client is interested—deeply interested, I may say—in this—this Maggie Sturge."

"Wait a bit, man. Come indoors. We won't discuss this thing in the street," said Doctor John.

"A very good thought of yours! I would much rather not. I was just going to ask you to walk into yonder field."

"My cottage is a little way down the road. We will go in there," observed Doctor John.

"You will let me see this girl, of course," said Mr. Nettleby.

"That depends," answered Doctor John. "I have not got to the bottom of you yet."

With this remark, he led the way into his cottage, entered the front room, motioned his visitor to a seat, and turned the key of the front door.

"Now," said Doctor John, "what is it?"

"Well, before I can say anything more, I really *must* see this Maggie. Your Maggie may not be the one I am in search of."

John gave the man a keen, scrutinising look, and seemed better satisfied. It was more the man's cautious, professional manner—the shell of the man, as it were—that had excited John's unjust suspicion, rather than the man himself; for his face was kindly.

"You don't mean this child any harm?" asked John.

"Harm!" exclaimed the lawyer, with astonishment. "Harm! Why, if the same thing were to

A Doctor in Corduroy

happen to my child, and I have got one just her age, God bless her! why, I should think fortune had highly favoured her. Do you know, sir, that my client is worth something like half a million?"

"I don't care what your client is worth," answered Doctor John, "and I don't ask. I only say, are his or her intentions honourable?"

The dried-up old lawyer laughed—yes, he actually laughed, for him, a hearty laugh; but compared to that of Doctor John, it was like the wheeze of a clarionet beside the full blast of a trumpet.

"Make your mind quite easy on that score," he answered, "and let me see Maggie Sturge."

The Doctor opened the door and called out loudly, "Maggie!" whereupon there came running in from the garden a very pretty girl, full of robust health and buoyant spirits.

"Maggie, here is a gentleman to see you."

The child had come bounding into the room with a hop, skip, and a jump, but now looked rather ashamed of herself.

"Let me introduce myself," said Mr. Nettleby, rising and bowing. "Let me present you with my card," and he pulled out his case and gave one to her. "You see," he added, with a smile, "I may make known *my* name, but not that of my client. Will you excuse me while I just refer to my book?" Then he glanced at the girl's face, and afterwards at his book.

"With your permission, Mr.—?" and he paused.

"Doctor John is my name," was the answer.

"Doctor John," repeated Mr. Nettleby, with some surprise and accent on the "doctor," "with your

permission, I will ask Miss Sturge a few questions. Now, did anything unusual happen in the village three months ago?"

Maggie thought a moment, then she answered: "Yes; Grunley's sow had thirteen pigs, the biggest litter for some years, wasn't it, John?"

"Ha! I mean something in the nature of an accident."

"There was my cochin-china hen broke eight of the eggs she was sitting on," answered Maggie thoughtfully.

"Nothing else?" asked the lawyer, with a smile.

"Oh! I know," exclaimed Maggie. "A horse had a fit, and John cured it. And the gentleman in the carriage gave me a sovereign in mistake for a bright halfpenny, and I have got it now, and I will give it him back if ever I see him."

The lawyer tried hard to repress a smile. But he was pleased. He was quite sure now he had found the right child, and there was no need for further cautious questioning. Only just one more to mystify the man and mislead him.

"That is not the accident I mean. There was no accident to a—to a cow, for instance?"

Maggie did not remember one, and appealed to Doctor John.

"I don't know of one," said Doctor John.

"Ah, well," said the lawyer, waving his hand, "we can do without that. It is not a matter of great importance. What I have to say is this: My client desires you to be sent to the best boarding-school that can be found. You will be taught

everything. You are to have the best clothes money can buy, and ten shillings a week pocket-money."

Maggie was thoughtful. "What does 'client' mean?" she asked.

"A lady or gentleman who is interested in you," answered the lawyer.

"What will they do for John and Phil?" asked Maggie.

"My instructions do not extend beyond yourself," replied the lawyer, with an amused smile. "I may add I am instructed to give your guardian twenty pounds to be expended straight away in the purchase of suitable clothing for you. You ought now to jump for joy."

"But I don't," answered Maggie.

"Why?"

"Because I don't want to leave John."

While Mr. Nettleby was talking to Doctor John, Reuben Starkham drove back to the "Red Lion."

"What does this mean?" he thought. "It's very mysterious. What does old Nettleby want at a cottage? Now I remember when that accident occurred to 'Turkey'" (this was the name given by Reuben to his employer), "he was talking to a little girl—just an ordinary village child. I never knew him do that before, and I saw him give her something, too. He don't throw his money away like that as a rule. Then, what about that chestnut tree business? No, old Parchment, it won't do. Not quite so green as that. Something in the wind—but what? Turkey, you are a deep 'un!"

CHAPTER XIII

GRAINGER, UNLIMITED

THE style of the firm was Grainger, Ltd. Grainger, Unlimited, would have been a better title, for Mr. Grainger was very large in person, in wealth, and in brag. At the time he is now reintroduced to the reader (it will be remembered he has already made his appearance), he was impatiently pacing up and down the office in his large warehouse at Norencester. The day before, he had instructed his solicitor to go to Burstone with his clerk, who would point out the exact spot where a certain accident happened. From this he would be able to locate the cottage he was to visit.

Mr. Nettleby kept his appointment to the minute. Clients with half a million were not to be found every day, and their convenience must be studied. Besides, it was characteristic of Mr. Nettleby to time his visit to the minute. He would have deemed it as great a breach of etiquette to arrive one minute before time as to be one minute late.

But it is two minutes yet by Mr. Grainger's massive gold watch before Mr. Nettleby is due to arrive, and while waiting for him, a glance, both retrospective and as he is at this moment, may fitly be given to Mr. Grainger.

He was emphatically a self-made man.

"Look at me," he would say; "see what I have done. What did I have to start with? Why, nothing; I made it all myself," and he would slap his pocket significantly. "Why, I could buy up the whole town if I liked. How did I make it? Well," and here he would draw himself up to his full height, stick his thumbs into the arm-holes of his waistcoat, and extending his hands wide open, say: "It's all told in one word, sir—BRAINS."

"When did Mr. Grainger make this speech?" The question would be better put the other way: "When did Mr. Grainger not make this speech?" He had made it to the parson, he had made it to the squire; indeed, he had dinned it into the ears of everybody of high and low degree, with perhaps one exception—the income-tax collector.

The world looked with admiration on Mr. Grainger. He had so many virtues. Let me enumerate them, even if some of them are negative in character.

To begin with, there was no mock modesty about him.

"It's brains," he would exclaim, waving his hand grandiloquently. "The Almighty hasn't given 'em to everybody. But He gave 'em to me, and I used 'em. I did not make them, but I made everything else."

Perhaps his chief virtue was his extreme energy. Nothing of a public character took place in Norencester, the town in which his business was situated, but he had his finger in the pie. He had been known to button-hole the local member of Parliament, and say to him: "What the country

wants, sir, is a business man like me at the head of affairs. If you think of resigning, I am quite willing to take your place in Parliament."

Mr. Grainger was as active in the country as he was in town. He resided in a country mansion a few miles from Norencester. He had built himself a large and gaudy house standing a little way back from the road, but not too far to be clearly visible to all persons going by, who stared through the gilded iron railings. It stood surrounded by much statuary, fountains, and a large mirror framed with rocks and creepers. Mr. Grainger had evidently "done" the Continent, and copied in his dwelling the inartistic tawdriness of some fifth-rate German beer-gardens.

He presided at every social gathering of the village, and made short speeches, always laudatory of the self-made man, of which he was a living example. He usually pictured a man who had commenced life on one penny, and who, by great perseverance and industry, had amassed a fortune, and he always concluded his speech by saying: "And who do you think that boy was?" and paused for effect. Once that pause had been filled in by the shrill voice of a half-witted, half-frightened village lad, who said: "Please, sir, it wasn't me."

"'I,' he means," said the village schoolmistress, fearful that the grammatical error should be a reflection on her teaching. "Please excuse the interruption."

"*You*, madam," said Mr. Grainger, "you were never a boy."

The schoolmistress blushed very red; the vicar coughed; the squire leaned back in his chair and

roared ; but still, all unconscious of the meaning of the schoolmistress's explanation, he went on :

"*That* boy never wore petticoats. *That* boy was Thomas Grainger."

Applause followed, led by the vicar, during which Mr. Grainger resumed his seat.

So active and willing to help everybody was Mr. Grainger that he had once even offered to write the vicar's sermons. The offer was declined as delicately as it could be. Once he had said to that gentleman, the meek, inoffensive Mr. Lamthorne: "What the Church wants is a man like me, a self-made man, to teach the people how to get on in life. That's my idea of real religion. You don't want to know a lot of Greek and Latin, and all that rubbish. Look at me, only paid a penny a week for all my schooling, and what is there I don't know that's worth knowing."

Mr. Lamthorne mentally winced, but he did not dare combat the assertion as to what constituted real religion, for was not his church a very poor one, and did not Mr. Grainger drop a piece of paper every week into the offertory bag, on which was written: "Pay George Lamthorne, or order, five guineas. Grainger, Ltd.," with a big, bold flourish from the end of the final letter, that was anything but limited.

Another virtue exhibited by Mr. Grainger in the country was his piety, or what he considered to be that. Did he not lead the responses in church in a loud voice, gazing round on the congregation with a look which seemed to say: "See me, see the great, self-made man, Thomas Grainger, the head of the firm of Grainger, Ltd., of world-wide fame. See what an example I set you."

He was most regular in his attendance at the church ; no blinding snow or pelting rain ever kept him away. Every Sunday morning his gaudy carriage rolled up to the church gate, scattering the villagers to the right and left as it sped swiftly along.

Only with the best county families did Mr. Grainger associate, and never had he been known to speak to a humble villager. He could not, therefore, be called a gossip. Surely this was another negative virtue.

He was never morose or gloomy. He laughed loudly and frequently, but always at his own coarse jokes. He hated all kinds of affectation. "There was none of that about him," he said. Grief of all kinds he considered unmanly, and the tears of womankind sheer hysteria.

Perhaps, next to his energy, his great virtue was prudence. This was most noticeable in town, being continually displayed in his business. If a man was not worth the wages paid him, dismiss him, or reduce his salary by half. Men who were past their prime were prudently dismissed to make way for younger men. Once a servant had been caught in some petty theft, and Mr. Grainger had prosecuted. The magistrate had discharged the culprit with a warning, thinking him much underpaid, and placed in a position of great temptation. Mr. Grainger was furious, and wrote to the Press about it, declaring the leniency of the magistrate was an incentive to crime. To quote his letter, he said : "I was actuated by prudence, the welfare of the public, and the honour and integrity of manhood." His secretary, Starkham,

a sort of Jackal to the Lion, had composed the letter for him.

"I should like to meet that magistrate in society," said Mr. Grainger. "I would give him a bit of my mind."

"I don't suppose you will ever meet him," said Starkham. "You only associate with gentlemen, you know."

"Quite so; quite so," said Mr. Grainger, evidently much pleased.

"Do you know," continued Mr. Starkham, "I once met this Mr. Benthorne, the magistrate, and I noticed he had on a bone collar-stud. No gentleman wears a bone collar-stud."

"No, he doesn't," said Mr. Grainger, most decisively.

Prudence, energy, perseverance, these combined, had helped Mr. Grainger to obtain his present position in the commercial world.

"*Capital* rules everything," said Mr. Grainger. "All must give way to it. The days of the little trader are ended. The tendency of the times is for all the little traders to go to the wall. Capital will crush them. I take their business, and they become my servants. How many shops have I scattered throughout England, Mr. Starkham?"

"Two hundred and fifty, sir."

"Two hundred and fifty! that is what capital will do, and capital is ME."

Such was this self-made man, a colossus of capital, coarse of speech, coarser of feeling, hard of heart, and apparently without one atom of sentiment in his nature. And yet there was one little corner of his

heart in which Love had once set up its throne, and through all these years of greed and gain, in which he had fostered naught but Self and tried his hardest to stamp out every atom of his better nature, it lingered still.

It was but a memory of the past, a memory of fourteen years ago ; but long ago as it was, it had never grown dim ; in fact, with time it grew stronger, and gathered in intensity and purpose. With all his capital, with all his success, there were times when even these ceased to satisfy him ; and then came the *memory*. During the last two years his health had failed him. Frequently, as he sat at his desk, he would see columns of figures dancing in the air before him, and then he would consult his physician, who would say : "The brain must have complete rest." So he had to go away for three months at a time, and endure what, to an active man like him, was the misery of enforced rest. He could not sleep at night, and would lie awake thinking. Then came the memory. That memory was a little child in a broken washing-basket.

Thomas Grainger had married Mary Tuckler, and soon after his marriage her father died, and it was found that he had hoarded four thousand pounds. This was the "penny" on which Grainger had really started life. Before that he was only a shrewd higgler, earning at the most two pounds a week. He at once started a wholesale poultry and provision business, with retail branches, opened as his business grew, all over England, and he succeeded even beyond his most cherished hopes.

- He had never really loved his wife ; but she had

been a companion, someone to talk to, who never wearied of his boasting, who waited on him, and served him like a faithful, obedient dog; and when she died, he felt her loss more than ever he thought he should. As he sat in his large, luxurious room, he looked towards her empty chair and thought: Why should he not have it filled? He could marry? Yes; but who would marry him but for his money, and he put that idea from him as being distasteful. But week by week he grew more lonely, and then there came the memory of the little babe, and the bright, sweet eyes of the child he had seen on the village green, and her remark how she would have loved her father.

With all his wealth he was a lonely man, without a child, almost without a relative, and certainly without a friend. Life had left him at the age of fifty-four with nothing but gold, shattered health, and—a *memory*.

But why should not this memory become a reality? Why not educate this girl, and adopt her as his daughter? Perhaps this might be possible, if he kept his own personality in the background. The first step would be to get her away from her relatives; and, as he supposed her mother was living, he approached them through his solicitor.

Mr. Nettleby arrived to the exact minute of his appointment with Mr. Grainger.

"I suppose the grandfather and the mother both jumped at the offer?" said Mr. Grainger, as he motioned his lawyer, Mr. Nettleby, to a chair.

"They are both dead," observed Mr. Nettleby. "I extracted this information from a somewhat

rough-looking horse doctor, who tried to be funny."

"With whom is the girl living?" asked Mr. Grainger. He was glad to hear the news, though he would not show it.

"With this same horse doctor," answered the lawyer.

"Ah!" said Mr. Grainger, "a ruffianly fellow whom I have met before. Well, then," said Mr. Grainger, "he jumped at the offer, *that* is very certain."

"On the contrary, he has not decided to accept it. He is going to think it over and let me know."

"He can't know what the offer means. He can't know who I AM." Mr. Grainger leant back in his large, comfortable, well-cushioned arm-chair, and placing his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, spread his fingers out wide. "Of course," he repeated, "he does not know who *I* am. You could not disclose that to him. Now we may do so, however."

"I don't think that will make any difference to him," added the lawyer. "He fails to appreciate the worth of money."

"Silly fool!" replied Mr. Grainger, with supreme contempt.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BUYER OF LOVE

MR. GRAINGER alighted from his carriage. He looked up and down the road, not certain which cottage was the more likely one in which to find Doctor John. While he was looking about he saw a girl climb quickly on to the top of a stile, placed at a narrow pathway in the hedge, and with a light jump, come bounding to the road almost at his feet. In an instant he recognised that it was Maggie. She, too, recognised the stranger as the gentleman who had given her the coin.

"You made a great mistake," she said, "when you were here before. It must be three years ago now, but I have kept it, hoping to see you. Grandfather would never let me spend it; and I wanted to very much. There were such lots of fine things I wanted to buy."

"What mistake did I make?" asked Mr. Grainger, with an amused smile.

"Why, you gave me a sovereign in mistake for a bright halfpenny. John says he is quite sure it was a mistake, because you beat him down so over his charge for attending to the horse—you know the one that had a, fit. And now I will just run

indoors and get the sovereign. John is taking care of it for me."

It was delightful to hear her talk. She was so pretty, and had such a sweet smile and vivacious manner. He did not in the least resent her allusion to his meanness in the matter of John's fee. He looked upon it as a choice piece of hard bargain-driving, a smart stroke of business, and very creditable to him, for economy should be studied in all things, large or small. It was characteristic of the man.

Maggie ran off to fetch the sovereign, but he called her back before she had gone many steps.

"Wait a minute," he said. "You can keep the sovereign."

"Thank you!" returned Maggie, much pleased. "I—I am sorry I said that rude thing about the meanness."

Mr. Grainger was going to say something further to the girl, but she went bounding along the road to tell John of her good fortune. The man watched which cottage she entered, and then followed her. He knocked loudly at the door with his gold-knobbed stick.

"Who is there?" called out John. "Here, Maggie, just run and open the door."

The girl did so, and came bounding back to say that it was the gentleman who had given her the sovereign, and whom she had just seen again.

John came down the passage immediately.

"I wish for a conversation with you," said Mr. Grainger. "This is who I am," and he gave

John a card pulled from an elaborate carved ivory card-case.

"Come in," said John, leading the way to the front room.

Mr. Grainger entered, sat down on a chair, leant back in it comfortably, folded his arms, and crossed his legs. Only a week ago, Lord Elkington had called to see John about a horse he had examined for him. He had sat in that identical chair, but he had done something that Grainger had omitted to do: he had removed his hat. It is always the vulgar rich, never the true-born aristocrat, who neglect the common courtesies of man to man. John made no remark, but he, of course, noticed it.

"I and you have met before," observed Mr. Grainger. "We had a foolish squabble in the road, but that was some years ago, and I trust is done with."

"So far as I am concerned, yes. I giv' you quite as good as you giv' me—perhaps a little better," said John.

"We can dismiss that from our memory," observed Mr. Grainger, waving his hand as grandiloquently as if he had been the victor, and he wished to spare the feelings of the vanquished.

"Forget and forgive is my motto," said John. "Even a 'dangerous ruffian' can do that, you know," he added, with a smile.

"We all says things in the heat of temper we don't quite mean," said Mr. Grainger, in a tone that perhaps just verged on apology.

He had a purpose in view, and thought it best to be conciliatory.

"Well, what do you want now?" asked John.
"No more horses in fits, eh?"

"No. I have been expecting that you would have long since made some reply to the visit of my lawyer. For certain reasons, I thought it best you should not know who the unknown client was. Now, I think it best to make it known. That client you now see. And when you see me, you see CAPITAL," and he rapped the sofa with his stick, and looked to see what effect he had made on John.

It was very little, if any. John thought as much of the dust arising from the blow to the sofa as he did of Mr. Grainger's capital.

"When you see me," continued Mr. Grainger, "you see Industry" (another blow on the sofa); "you see Energy, Perseverance, Success" (another blow with the stick).

"I don't see any of them," observed John quietly.
"But what I do see is, you are making a thundering lot of dust."

Mr. Grainger waved his hand as if that were a mere nothing.

"Now," he said, "what is your answer to my lawyer's unknown client, which is me?"

"I have not quite decided what is best for Maggie," answered John quietly. "My sister thinks she ought to go."

"Your sister seems to have common-sense. That is one of my attributes. That is the secret of my success in life."

"But I am not sure what I shall do," answered John. "Self and Duty are a little bit at cross here."

"You are quite sure you understand who I am, Thomas Grainger of The Mansion, Rushmere, and head of the firm of Grainger, Ltd., of world fame."

"Quite so; quite so," said Doctor John; "but I must ask you one or two questions. I should have asked them of your lawyer if I had known all I do now. You are no relation to this girl?" asked Doctor John, looking at him keenly.

"None at all," was the answer.

"Very curious," observed Doctor John, not at all satisfied. "Why do you want to educate her, then?"

"I will be plain with you. She has a pretty face, and I take a fancy to her. I want to educate her and adopt her as my daughter, and make her my heiress. I am getting on in life—perhaps I am a little lonely at times; I have lost my wife. Is it unnatural that I should wish for someone to—to care for me?" he added, with just a touch of sadness in his voice.

"Well," answered Doctor John, "I must think it over. I have not yet decided what is best."

Mr. Grainger looked at Doctor John keenly. He thought he could fathom him. Through life he had always said: "Everything and everybody has his price."

"Now," he said, "look here! This girl that I want is with you. I don't know that you have any more right to her than I have. We will waive that. I can afford to educate her and make a real lady of her, and you can't. You part with her, and she becomes mine. She will care for me then, not you. Therefore, I am fair and liberal, and what I say is: Here is

compensation, one hundred pounds, and I will write the cheque now."

Doctor John said, with even more than a touch of sarcasm: "So you think everything can be bought for money."

"I have always found it so, if you bid high enough. I have always bid high, and bought the best of everything, whether it is a manager for a business or a shop to stick him in."

"Still, there is something your gold can't buy," returned Doctor John quietly.

"Oh, of course," answered Grainger. "I couldn't buy the British Fleet or the United States of America. I am not such a fool as to think that. I mean anything within reason. Anything I want."

"And I mean something you want. Your gold will never buy that girl from me."

"Ah! my bid not high enough? You want a lot, my friend. Make it two hundred, then. I don't care."

Doctor John sprang to his feet.

"Will you never understand that your filthy gold cannot buy that girl's *love*? She loves me, and I love her, and you shall never buy her from me. No; if she leaves me for you, it shall be because it is best for her. I love Maggie, and feel I cannot part with the child. I may conquer the latter feelin' soon, and see it is for her good—but your money would never help me to doing it."

"Of course," observed Mr. Grainger, "it will be for her good. What will she be here? Merely a country girl, and marry some clodhopper with perhaps a pound a week."

"I do not know that she need do that. But it is early days to talk of this."

"Well," observed Mr. Grainger, rising, "my offer is open for another week. If I don't hear from you by this day week I shall conclude that my offer is declined, and that you decide to ruin that girl's prospects."

Then he strode to the door, and with his back to Doctor John and his head poised in the air, he said, speaking at him over his shoulder :

"Well, if you change your mind about that two hundred pounds you can let me know. I can tell you that money is not picked up in the gutter like that every day."

"I shall change my mind," answered John firmly, "when love can be as you think, bought and sold like your own pounds of tea and butter."

CHAPTER XV

PHIL'S NARRATIVE

AT the age of thirteen I left school. What was to be done with me? I rather thought I would like to be a horse doctor, like John, and I might have been, had I not one day gone with him to Squire Benthorne's at Norencester. He was attending to a horse there. While so engaged, the Squire came out, and seeing me, said:

"Is that the boy I have heard you speak of?"

"Yes," replied John; "I have adopted him."

"What are you going to do with him?"

"I don't know yet. That is the very question I am turning over in my mind—like a cow does the cud, you know—only a cow makes milk, and at present I don't get any forwarder with mine, it's cud, and that is all."

"How old are you, boy?" asked the Squire.

"Thirteen, sir," I answered.

"Small for his age," said he. "Been to school?" he next asked of me.

"Yes," I answered.

"And learnt a lot of rubbish that is of no use to him, I'll be bound; and altogether as big a fool as most boys of his age are. That's so, isn't it?" he asked sharply, addressing me.

"I suppose so," I replied, not knowing what else to say.

"Well, and now the thing is to make something of you and knock all that damn nonsense about Julius Cæsar, and Hercules, and X, the unknown quantity, and all that rubbish out of your head, and put something sensible into it. I know a fine chance for a smart boy like you. I suppose you *are* smart?" he asked.

"He is smart enough," said John, with a smile, "especially where vittles is concerned, aren't you, Phil?"

"Oh, that's his name, is it?" said the Squire. "Ah, well, I will be bound he has his *fill*," and he laughed heartily at his own pun.

John laughed, and I, of course, joined in.

"Well," he continued, addressing John, "it's just this: I have got a brother-in-law in Paris. He is a Frenchman, and has a large factory. They make a lot of perfumery, and they do a bit of trade with England, and some of them can't understand our lingo, and they are always sending out letters to be translated. So accordingly, he writes to me to send him over a sharp young boy. Is he sharp?"

"As sharp as my lancet," answered John.

"Well, he wants an English boy who will be able to learn French in six months, and do their letters. But thirteen, you know," he remarked, "is a bit young, and he's small, too. How does he write?"

"Better than I can a lot," answered John. "Perfect copperplate, I call it."

"Let me see his writing. Here, come you indoors and write a letter I will call out."

I followed him in, and wrote from his dictation a short letter.

"Egad!" he remarked, when I handed it to him, "he can spell better than I can, and it ain't a bad fist either. Well, I'll write over to this froggy brother-in-law of mine, and tell him all about it."

A few days after this interview, the Squire reined up his horse at John's cottage.

"Here you are," he said. "It's a letter from his wife (that's my sister, you know), and it's written to my wife, and it's all in English, and of course, all about dress and fallals of that sort. But here is a postscript from himself. I don't suppose you can read the silly thing any more than I can," and he pointed to these three words:

"Envoyez le garçon,"

"but it means 'Send the boy,' so my wife says."

"Would you like to go, Phil?" asked John.

The thought of seeing the world filled me with delight, and I said: "Yes, please, John."

"And a damn good answer too," said the Squire, "That boy has got some pluck in him, I can see."

I was delighted at the time; but a few weeks later, when it came to leaving Burstone, and saying "Good-bye," I was not so elated. The world became less inviting then.

My little box was packed by Sarah. I think she was kinder to me then than I had ever known her to be, for she made a large cake and put it in my box.

"Those Frenchmen," she said, "live on frogs and snails. You won't get any proper wittles there." This

was almost her last speech to me, and it did not make the prospect more cheering.

At length the day came for me to leave, and with many tears, I took leave of Maggie, who insisted on giving me all her pocket-money.

John decided to accompany me as far as Boulogne, which we were to reach by steamboat from the Thames. So he went with me there, found a hotel at hand, engaged a bed for me for the night, and returned by the same boat that evening to London. The time allowed him just two hours to arrange things at the hotel, take my box to the railway station, get my ticket for Paris, and leave all clear for me to start by the morning train. I was to be met at the Paris terminus by my future employer. John had some supper with me at the hotel, but I was too upset to eat anything, and I don't think he enjoyed it either. I remember it was in the summer. It was a Sunday night, and the quay on which I stood to see John leave was thronged with people taking the air.

"Good-bye, Phil, old chap! God bless you!" said John.

And as the boat started, he leaned over the side and called out, while his face lighted up with that bright, comical smile of his: "Allus mates, old chap, ain't we?"

I kept my tears back somehow, waved my hand, and called back to him: "Yes, John, always mates," then stood and watched the steamer bear him away across the dark sea.

I remember the water that night was extremely phosphorescent, and as the steamer sped away, its

paddle-wheels threw out showers of silver spray. I noted its track out on the dark ocean, till it and the silver streak it had made were lost in the darkness of the night. Then I turned to go back to my hotel, a few hundred yards away, the bearings of which John had made me carefully note. As I went along, and heard the sound of strange voices speaking in a tongue not one word of which I understood, a sense of my utter loneliness came upon me.

When I returned to the hotel, the landlady, who was on the look-out for me, said: "*Vous veuillez coucher, n'est-ce pas ?*"

I did not understand a word, but seeing that she held a lighted candle, I nodded assent, and followed her to my bedroom, a large, spacious apartment, in which I seemed lost.

"*Dormez bien, mon pauvre garçon,*" she said kindly, and shut the door.

I got into bed, burst into tears, and sobbed myself to sleep.

In the morning I found a good breakfast waiting me, which had been paid for overnight by John. But I could eat little. When I made signs that I had finished, the proprietress herself conducted me to the station, and put me in the train for Paris. I was met on my arrival there by a lad named Felix Roquet, who was about three years my senior. It had been arranged that I was to hold a pocket-handkerchief in my hand ; so this youth easily managed to pick me out from among the crowd arriving by train. Having seen after my little box, and satisfied the Customs that I was not importing into Paris any goods on which duty was chargeable

he arranged for a porter to take it to the warehouse of the firm. Having done this, he pulled out of his pocket some cigarette-paper, and tobacco, which he handed me; much to his surprise, I declined.

As we walked along, my companion pointed to a restaurant, then to my mouth, and next pulled out his pocket, and showed me that it was empty. By this I suppose he thought I was hungry, that *there* was a restaurant to get food, and that he had no money to pay for it. I produced my purse that John had given me, and in which he had placed a half-sovereign, and two or three francs. We entered the restaurant, and I had some food. Felix opened his mouth, put his fingers to it, then sucked his lips, moving his hand round and round on his stomach, which I took to mean that he was hungry, and would like something too, so I nodded an invitation and an assent. Felix called the waiter, and ordered one or two *plats*. When we had finished, he made signs for me to pass him the money, and he would pay. I am now quite certain, from the character of the restaurant, that my few loose francs would have been more than sufficient. But I was not sure then either of the charge or of the value of the coins, so I passed over my half-sovereign, not wishing to appear mean, and rather proud of my capital. (Everyone knows that although you cannot pass a ten-franc gold coin in this country, there is not the slightest difficulty in getting change on the Continent for English gold at the humblest restaurant you may enter.) I was much surprised, when Felix handed me back my change, to find

how dear food was in Paris ; half of John's gift was gone.

When we got outside, Felix lit up another cigarette, and conducted me to my destination. I found a sign on the door, " Hautant et Fils," and below, " Fabricant des Parfumeries." I learnt there were two Hautants, father and son, and that the former was brother-in-law to my English squire. The place to which I was first conducted was in Rue des Paradis Poissoniere, and it was a sort of office, warehouse, and showroom ; while the factory was about a mile away, right on the top of Bute Montmartre. Hautant *père* was a kindly old gentleman of sixty, who gave about four hours a day to the business, and the rest to sipping *eau sucré* at a *café*, where he amused himself playing dominoes. He lived with his wife in a little villa on the outskirts of Paris. His son, Emile Hautant, took his meals at a restaurant, and slept, or was supposed to sleep, at a flat very close to the office *au troisième*. These apartments consisted of three rooms, and the outer one of these, through which it was necessary to pass to reach the others, was given me as my bedroom.

My breakfast at twelve o'clock was sent into the office from a little cheap restaurant close by, and consisted of one course, a cutlet, or meat of some kind, followed by a little jam to eat with any bread I could manage to spare for that purpose. We closed the warehouse at six, and I went to another restaurant close by for my dinner, which was paid for weekly by the firm. These were the only two meals I had. I was a growing boy, and could have eaten double.

Of course, I had finished my dinner at half-past six or a quarter to seven at the latest, and from then

till it was time to go to bed, I had nothing to do but go and sit in my apartments alone, or wander about the streets. I knew no one, nor could I—certainly for the first few months—have held any conversation with them if I did. A sense of great loneliness came upon me, as night after night I walked alone aimlessly about the streets till it was bed-time. My loneliness seemed only accentuated by the gaiety and glitter all around me. Everyone was laughing, or chatting, to someone near to me, and in a language I did not understand. The notices in the shops, the advertisements on the hoardings, the cries of the street-vendors, the whines of the beggars, were all new and strange to me. Nothing seemed familiar save the barking of a dog.

I used sometimes to wander to the Tuilleries, and stare at the heap of ruins, or go and look at the dark, silent river. These seemed less lonesome to me than the unknown crowd of the streets. No stranger in a strange land could ever have been more lonely than I at times, as I wandered aimlessly among the gay, glittering crowd of Paris.

If I stayed at home instead of going out, I had to sit all alone in my room at the top of a large building. I had my own latch-key, and let myself in to my apartments, while the large hall door leading from the street would be opened by the *concierge*, in response to my ring. But even this man I scarcely saw at night-time. He sat in his little room, and opened the door by pulling a cord, and just raised his head to glance through his glass door as I passed into the building from the street, speaking to no one, and being spoken to by none.

M. Emile Hautant seldom slept in the place. Now and then I was awakened in my sleep by hearing the door open, and someone pass me in the dark, but it was quite an exception to the usual rule. He would go there now and then, as we left off work for the day, just to change his clothes, but even that was seldom. Why he needed the flat never occurred to me. Had I been older, I should have known it was for appearances. The porter from the warehouse cleaned it, and made my bed. He also took my linen to the wash, but no one did any mending or darning, and by the time I had been there six months, the socks in particular were more holes than socks.

Felix, who met me at the station, I never saw after business but twice. The first was the second day after my arrival, when he met me as I came out of the restaurant where I had dined. He made me understand that he would take me round and show me Paris, or at least that is what I understood from signs and from a phrase book and dictionary which I kept in my pocket, and to which we both referred. Felix drew an illustration with his pencil on the white stone wall of a building by which we were standing, of a chair, and a man on a stage singing. Then he pointed to me, and then to the chair. Next he drew another chair, and pointed to himself. Then he wrote, "Two francs," and I nodded, as I still wished to be friendly. He took me to some gardens where there was music, for which I paid a franc each admission, and we sat down at a round table. A waiter came quickly up, and wiped its top with his serviette, although I noticed it was perfectly clean. Felix ordered *café noir* for each of us, and a cognac and a

cigar for himself. I had the pleasure of paying for all.

It was about two days after this that Felix again proposed another evening out. I did not want to spend the last few francs I had left, and told him so as plainly as I could. But Felix slapped his pocket, and showed me some money, giving me to understand that he would pay this time. So I accepted his kind offer. He met me as I came out of my restaurant as usual, and I was surprised to find he had a young girl with him about his own age, to whom he introduced me. We walked together towards the same gardens as before, and as we neared it, Felix lagged behind a little. Not so the young lady. She drew her arm through mine, and said bewitchingly :

"J'aime bien les Anglais !" They are so generous. The English nation I honour. Don't you think they are so liberal ?

What could I say for the credit of mine own country, but that I believed they were ?

I had scarcely made that remark when I found we were in front of the turnstile, and that my fair questioner went in first and made no signs of producing any money, but waited for me. I felt the honour of my country was at stake, and like the foolish, proud young Briton that I was, I went forward, put my hand in my pocket and paid for two.

As we passed in, the young lady said, with much approbation : *"Vivent les Anglais ;"* but I noted she looked back and waited for France, for Felix soon joined us. The girl's arm was quickly transferred from England to France, and Felix and his companion soon managed to lose me and themselves

too amongst the shrubbery. I saw them no more that evening.

As I had now spent all my money, that was the last time Felix proposed showing me the sights of Paris.

I had not been away long before I had a letter from John asking me if I was comfortable, and had all I wanted ; but I was too proud to write to him and say I was very ill-fed, and very lonely. I had come to Paris of my own free will, and felt I must stop there.

How long I thus wandered about Paris I know not. It must have been a long while, and the period might have been the years 1872 and 1873, for the city was only just recovering from the desolation of the war and the commune.

CHAPTER XVI

THE DEMI-MONDAINE

I HAVE said little about my duties at the office. For the first few months I was given, by instructions of Hautant *père*, two hours a day in which to study a French and English grammar that he bought me. The other part of the day I used to pass away by packing parcels, copying letters, and in running to and from the warehouse to the factory.

I remember being once given a letter by Emile Hautant to take for him and wait for an answer. He called me into his private office, and described to me how to go there. I was, however, already beginning to know all the streets—certainly, in the immediate neighbourhood—and I was also beginning to know a little French, so that I could ask my way about without much difficulty.

The letter was addressed to *Madame* Julie Seargent, 44 bis Rue du Cadeau, and in the corner was written, "R.S.V.P." As I went out, Felix, who was always very inquisitive, took the letter from me, and reading the address, gave a wink, adding softly: "*Sa maitresse.*"

I knew sufficient French to know the English equivalent was "his mistress," but I think I was too young and innocent of the world for these words to convey any meaning to me.

I easily found the address, delivered my letter, and waited for the answer.

Madam came to the door herself. She was a young woman of twenty-four or twenty-five, not pretty, I thought; but she had a pleasing face, and I admired her small, even white teeth, and delicate white hands. She spoke with all the vivacity and gesture characteristic of a Frenchwoman. As she handed me the reply she had written, she said:

"So you are the little English boy, I expect, that Monsieur Emile speaks of?"

I said: "Yes, madam."

"And how do you like Paris?" she asked me.

"Not at all," I answered.

"Not like Paris? Oh, the gay, beautiful Paris? I love it! *J'aime bien la vie*. Why don't you like it?"

I said I was too lonely.

"What do you do?" she asked. "Are you not well amused? There is no place in the world like Paris. Oh, the balls, the theatres, the fêtes, the concerts! Me, I am always well amused. I love *la vie, la vie!*"

Her words, in English, have lost so much in translation. But uttered in French, with her graceful speech and pretty gesture, how piquant they seemed, how instinct with gaiety! Yet her gaiety found no responsive echo in me. She looked at me curiously. All at once she asked:

"What do you do of an evening?"

"Nothing," I answered. "I walk about the streets until it is time to go to bed."

"What, all alone?" she asked.

"Yes," I replied; "quite alone. I know no one."

"*Mon Dieu!*" she exclaimed, holding up her hands. "*Comme c'est triste!* No wonder," she continued, "you are *ennuyé!* Wait one minute."

Then she ran and brought me some cake and a glass of light wine, and made me sit to have it. She asked me further questions about myself, listening with evident sympathy to my answers.

"What do you do the Sundays?" she asked me.

"I hate Sundays," I said. "I wander about alone."

When I got back to the warehouse, and had delivered my note to Emile, I went and sat down at my desk. Presently, Felix came to my side and whispered:

"She is beautiful, isn't she?"

"I don't think she is beautiful," I said, "but she is very kind."

"Kind!" said he, in a tone of surprise.

I think it was on a Thursday that I took this note. On the following Sunday, just as we were closing business—we left off at twelve—Emile said to me: "I am going to give you a treat to-day. Run over to your bedroom, put on your best things, and give yourself an extra wash and brush. Be quick, and then come with me." I did as he directed me, and soon joined him, without any idea of what the treat was going to be. To my great surprise and delight, he took me to the flat in which "Madam" lived. It was thus he spoke of her, and it is thus I shall call her.

Madam was very pleased to see me, though I did not think surprised; and I saw at a side-table that knives and forks were set for three. I remember that we had a light luncheon, *en famille*, she called it, of a

cold fowl and salad, and some fancy cheese and sweets followed. Then she left us to dress in an adjoining room, while Emile smoked a cigarette and read the paper. When she was ready, we all went out together and got into an open carriage, and were driven to the Bois de Boulogne. Then we went to another *café* and had refreshment, and after that to a restaurant and had dinner, while all the time Madam was laughing and chatting and saying to me, in her pretty way: "There, don't you like Paris? You are not sad now?"

After dinner we went to another *café*, where we had coffee, and Madam and Emile each smoked cigarettes, and then we drove to a theatre, where I watched my first play, and was delighted. After this I left them, thanking them both for their kindness, Madam in particular; for I knew that it had all been at her instigation. As I left her she said: "Now you know what it is—*La vie, la vie*—and I hope you like it," and waved her hand to me as I left them. Then I went back alone, and climbed to my little room near the sky.

But this was not the only kindness that I was to receive from Madam. She arranged, as the winter approached, when they sometimes spent their evenings at home, for me to go there after my dinner and stay the evening. We played cards for small stakes. I now received a franc a week pocket-money from the firm, so I was not quite without coin. Madam was delighted if she won, but even more so if I did; and when I had lost much, she always slipped her share of the winnings back into my pocket as I left for the night.

One other kindness I received from her. Some of my garments, which much needed the attention of a needle, in particular my socks, she repaired for me, always at her own suggestion, never that of Emile. Of an evening we had coffee, and she taught me to smoke cigarettes, which she considered great fun ; and altogether, I passed many enjoyable evenings there.

I remember one incident distinctly, which showed that in this woman of the world there still lingered not only kindness and compassion for a lonely boy like myself, but a sense of her own shame, and a desire that my innocent boyhood might in no way be tainted by it. We were sitting one winter evening round the fire, and Emile was looking at an illustrated paper.

"This is good," he said, and calling Madam's attention to the picture, he looked at her with a sensual, meaning leer, and was about to read the wording that was underneath it, evidently of an indecent character. Madam glanced at the illustration, and in an instant, with a look at me and then at him, crumpled up the paper and put it on the fire. Emile made some remark of impatience, but that was all that was said. It was the only time I saw a touch of annoyance on Madam's bright, sunny face. I often saw it suffused with hearty laughter, as when Emile tried to learn a little English of me, and failed altogether to pronounce the word "The," saying in place of it "Ze." Madam could detect the difference in sound, although she failed to do much better herself.

But of these little incidents enough has been said to show that in my early boyhood I found my kindest

friend—indeed, my purest friendship—in one who was herself but a woman of the half world.

Before I had been in Paris many months I had a letter from John, saying he had decided to part with Maggie. Sarah was to take her to a good school, which had been chosen by a Mr. Grainger, who would, in the future, adopt Maggie as his daughter. John said it was hard to part with her, and that he missed me very much also, but he thought it would be best for Maggie to be away, as it was for me. His thoughts were of others, they were never centred on himself. The letter continued thus :

"Another thing, Phil, Sarah gets more irritable every day, and comes down sharp on Maggie, and if I take her part there is a fine ado. I enclose half-a-sovereign that I found growing in Burstone. You don't get too many of them in Paris, I know. Say when you want more clothes.

"P.S.—Always mates, Phil, aren't we? — Ever yours,
"JOHN."

This letter came about three months after I had been in Paris. I should have mentioned it before, but my thoughts, unlike John's, have been all about myself.

A few months later, I received another letter. This time it was from Maggie. It ran as follows:

"HAMPSTEAD COLLEGE.

"DEAR PHIL,—I am here at school. I have got to be made a lady. I hate being made a lady. I

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jumped over a chair in the garden the other day, and had to write a hundred lines because of my vulgarity. I can't say nothing, or do nothing (anything, I suppose, it should be, but the other sounds a lot nicer), without being told it is a breach of etiquette, or it's ungrammatical. I hate grammar; I detest etiquette!

"I like some of the girls here, but not all. Some of them are given to boasting what their fathers are. I told them mine was dead. What he was, I did not know. But my guardian (dear old John—how I love him!) was a doctor. (I didn't say horse doctor, my pride would not let me, and I have been ashamed of myself ever since.)

"The girls are very fond of imitating the way I talk, which they say is very countrified. I wish you could see my dresses; but boys do not care for dresses, do they? They are simply lovely. I know I have got the best in the school, and I am quite sure I have the most pocket-money. I am saving up to buy a good present for John. What shall I give him?

"Mr. Grainger has been to see me. He kissed me when he left. I spat on my handkerchief and rubbed the place well.

"Altogether, I have come to think I shall never be a lady. I would far sooner run about the fields. I do hope Sarah is looking after my fowls. I wonder how many chicks she got from Gessle's setting (this was the old cochin-china hen). But there, we have nothing of that sort here. We have to walk about very properly and sedately, just as if we were always going to church, and always wear gloves (my hands are getting quite white and delicate), and pass bread

on a fork, and never ask for a thing at table, but look after the girl at your side and see if you can pass her anything, and never eat with your knife, and never drink out of your saucer, and never speak with your mouth full, and never tilt your plate (you lose half the gravy), and never play hop-scotch or leap-frog; and never cross your legs; never push your plate away when you have finished, and never sop your crusts in your tea; well, it's all bothering nevers, from the time you get up in the morning, till the time you go to bed at night. I hate being made a lady.

"Then we go to church on Sundays, and walk two and two like the animals going into the Ark. But church *is* better than chapel, you know, for you *do* know when the prayers are going to finish.

"When Mr. Grainger called on Miss Robertson (that's the lady principal of the college), otherwise known as the old Geyser, who always sits as if she had swallowed the poker, and talks as if she had eaten the dictionary and the grammar too, she said to him: 'Would you like Miss Sturge to be taught other "extras," such as painting, gymnastics, and calisthenics?' 'Give her the lot, madam,' he replied. 'I regret she is not good at application,' observed Miss Robertson. 'Let her have that too,' said Mr. Grainger, waving his hand, 'expense is no object.'

"Shan't I know a lot by the time I am finished?

"Kind love. Hope you are well, and don't eat too many frogs. Ugh!—Yours affectionately,

"MAGGIE."

It was some time after I had been in Paris that the

continued poorness and insufficiency of food began to tell upon me. In the autumn of the second year of my residence there I fell ill. What was the matter with me I did not know—indeed, I was never told. I was simply taken to a hospital, and lay there for several weeks. I think it was some kind of a fever, but not infectious, because visitors came freely to see the other patients in the ward in which I was lying. How long I was there I do not remember. I became delirious, and lost all count of time. I can still recall distinctly some of the horrible dreams and hallucinations that attended me during the fever, but these, of course, I do not propose to record. But it was when I was getting better that I seemed to wake from a long, refreshing sleep—a sleep, too, that had many happy dreams of John and Burstone—and as I opened my eyes I saw by my bedside two figures intently watching me. Then one bent down, and said softly :

“ Phil, mate, don’t you know me ? ”

The other took my thin, wasted hand in hers, and cried : “ *Mon Dieu ! Pauvre garçon !* ”

The first, it is needless to say, was John, who added :

“ You have had a nice sleep, old chap. I have been sitting here some time ; but we wouldn’t wake you for all the wureld. Who is this lady that has been watching you too ? I can’t speak the lingo here, so I couldn’t ask her. Is it Madam, who you have spoken of in your letter ? ”

“ It is,” I answered.

“ I’d give summat to be able to speak to her. Just thank her like from me, will you, and tell her if ever she come to Burstone, she would be hearty welcome at our cottage. Mr. Hautant, he did come over the

other week, and stayed with Squire Benthorne—that's how I heard about you. But there, I expect as how she is a lady, and above us in means, by the look of her clothes; but her heart's in the right place. God bless her! Just tell her who I am, Phil, and then you must not speak another word, nor I to you; you are a lot too weak, little mate."

I told Madam, in a few words, that this was my dear old John, and lifting my head slightly, I made a sort of formal introduction. Instinctively she held out her hand to John, then partly withdrew it. It seemed to me that there was some momentary embarrassment in her manner, as though she were doubtful whether John would take the proffered hand. But one glance at his kind, open face reassured her. The hand was again put forward, to be firmly grasped by John, who said: "For all you have done for my little mate, thank you, thank you!"

Madam understood him. She had already learnt a few words of English from me, and indeed, if she had not, the expression of John's face, and the tones of his voice, carried his meaning to her. I do not think that John knew that Madam was not the wife of Emile. I had never told him in my letters. But it would have made no difference to his greeting; he had too large a heart for that, and would have been one of the last to cast upon this unfortunate but compassionate woman of the world the stone of her shame.

I think, by one little speech which Madam subsequently made, that John created a great impression on her. One evening—it was some months after my recovery, and I was spending the evening at the

flat in which Madam lived — Emile brought in a friend to join the card party. This gentleman had recently been to London on a week-end excursion. It rained all the time he was there, and he returned full of abuse of everything English.

“Dull, wet, miserable!” said he. “No amusements, and everything closed except churches and public-houses. I did not want to pray, and I did not want to get drunk. *Triste, mon Dieu!* London is *triste* on a Sunday; and,” continued he, “look at its dirty buildings and sloppy streets, its ugly men and women, with front teeth protruding like prongs.”

“Yes,” said Madam; “large teeth, large feet, large hands, and *large hearts*. *Vivent les Anglais!*”

It was a few months after this that I received the following letter from Sarah:

“BURSTONE.

“DEAR PHIL,—I am sorry to say that John has taken to drinking again. He has been a sober man for such a long time, that I thought he had quite given it up. I think it is because he is lonely now of an evening, now you and Maggie are away. One of you ought to come back. Can you come? I have got a little money saved, and will send over the fare. I am writing unknown to John. I spoke to him about it some little time back, and he said: ‘No; I will not stand in anyone’s light.’ You have got your way to make in the world, but you owe a duty to John too, as he took you out of the ditch, and to me that brought you up on a boat. You were a great trouble when you were a child, always knocking

the boat over and upsetting the milk, so, if you can be of any use now, you ought to come at once.

"It's all nonsense what John says about your learning French, just as if English was not good enough to talk with; and moreover, if God had intended you to speak French, you would have been born in France, instead of no one knows where."

When I read Sarah's letter, I at once translated it into French (omitting, perhaps, the allusion to the boat), and laid it before Emile Hautant, asking permission to leave. To my surprise, he refused it.

"You are just becoming useful," he said, "and we are now getting back some of the expenses we incurred by you in the first six months of your coming here. Leaving now is quite out of the question." I pleaded that John was very lonely, and was giving way to drink. "If he can't control his passions," said Emile, shrugging his shoulders, "he must put up with the result, that's all."

I was very sorry at not being able to go, and when I saw Madam I told her about it. She knew already all about John. I was never tired of saying how kind he had been to me, and how much I loved him. Madam told me I ought to speak to M. Hautant *père*. She believed by what Emile said of him that he was a very kind old gentlemen. So I decided to speak to him, and plead for leave to go. A week or more went by before I saw him. But at length I did. While I waited to catch sight of him, the knowledge that John was again relapsing into drink made the weeks seem months. When I spoke to Hautant *père*, he said to me, half in English and half in French;

"Go at once. I know this *Docteur* John. When I was in England last summer, staying with my brother-in-law, I had a nasty fall, and sprained my leg. Someone picked me up. It was your friend, Doctor John, my brother-in-law afterwards told me. When he saw me, he said: 'Well, I'm blarmed!' What is blarmed? A sort of *nom de Dieu* or *sacré mille tonneres*, I suppose. But never mind. When he heard me speak, he said: 'You are a Frenchman,' and I said: 'Yes'; and then he said: 'You will have to hop, mate, frogs always do.' Stupid English! They think we all eat frogs—much too expensive! But no matter. He jumped off his horse, lifted me up—what a big, strong fellow he is—and said: 'All right! Hold on,' and then he led me to his cottage. There he laid me on a sofa, went to his cupboard, got some oils and things, and rubbed my leg, and strapped it up. *Bien!* I was well in a week, and no wonder. He was what we call here a veterinary surgeon. Taking to drink? you say. Very sorry to hear it. Go at once."

"But M. Emile says 'No,'" I observed.

"I will soon see about that," said he; and he did.

The day before I left, I called on Madam to say "Good-bye!"

"And you have no mother to welcome you back?" she said. "How she would have loved you!"

I had never told her, or anyone else, of the visit of that dreadful stranger to Burstone Churchyard. For me my mother was dead.

"How pleased she would have been to see you," she continued. "How she would have looked forward to to-morrow, and how she would think you

had grown ! You have been in Paris two years now, have you not ? ” she asked.

“ More than two years,” I said ; “ but the last year has been so quick in going, compared with the first.”

“ Ah, you were lonely, were you not ? ” she remarked pensively.

We talked a while of other things, but she never talked of herself or her own future ; and then the time came for me to say good-bye. Extending my hand, I used the common French expression, and said : “ *Au revoir !* ”

To my surprise, she said : “ Not *au revoir*, but *adieu !* In a few years you will be a man, and then you will understand what I mean, and why it cannot be. I am sure you will do good to John—you have done good to me. *Bon voyage et adieu !* ”

So saying, she took my hand in hers, and bending down, kissed me—the only woman’s kiss I had received in my life ; and it was all good and pure, I am sure.

I thanked her again for all her kindness to me, or rather, tried to ; but the words would not come, and the tears did. Thus I slowly left her, and looking back as I went away, I saw that her eyes were glistening too.

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As I look back now upon my past life, after the lapse of many years, this little fellow wandering about the streets of Paris night after night, or playing *écarté* in the home of the *demi-mondaine*, seems no part of me, but a shadowy being I once knew, yet never was.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PARSON AGAIN

It will be remembered that Sarah did not go to Burstone Church, but to Zion Chapel, Norencester. But a change had taken place in the pastorate. Mr. Ray had resigned. During the fifteen years of his ministry the *personnel* of his congregation had undergone a great change. The old members had "shuffled off this mortal coil," while others had shuffled on.

There were some of the flock who evidently did not approve of Mr. Ray's long sermons, for it was said they bought a clock and hung it on the gallery right facing him. Once a Mr. Daniel Starkham was getting tired of the never-ending sermon, and looked hard at the preacher, and then meaningly at the timepiece on the gallery panelling, whereupon Mr. Ray smiled and said: "It's no use, Brother Starkham, looking at the clock, I haven't half done yet." After that, they gave up any such hinting as futile.

Not only was his sermon long and tedious, but his prayers were most wearisome. He never by any chance carried out himself the advice he once gave at a prayer meeting, when a deacon was too lengthy in his meditation. "Pray short, Brother Stonehurst,"

said he, "there are plenty of us." But Mr. Ray never did "pray short." Indeed, his prayers were a striking contrast to the beauty and brevity of the only recorded prayer of the Master. But Sarah seemed to enjoy them, and would often call out "Amen" and "Praise the Lord." Indeed, many of the congregation did. In this matter she, and those who did so, were no doubt quite sincere and earnest. But many grew weary of the prayers and the sermons, and were very thankful when the "in conclusion" stage was reached. They bore it as long as they could, and at length agitated for a new pastor. So Mr. Ray abdicated, and Ernest Venner reigned in his stead.

The new pastor came from another chapel; indeed, the Church had to wait a few months for him to finish his engagement there. But he came at length, and (oh, horror!) he wore a gown, and he told the congregation he wanted more reverence in the service, more of that deep, earnest reverence which, he said, "thank God, so characterises the Anglican Church."

There are two or three conversations concerning the new minister that should be put before the reader. The first took place at Burstone, and was between Doctor John, his sister Sarah, and a friend, Mrs. Bloggs, wife of the village shoemaker. It occurred a few Sundays after the coming of the new pastor.

"I don't like the new minister at all," said Sarah. "He is much too young for me to sit under. I couldn't trust my soul to him."

"He's a good fellow," remarked John quietly.

"Made you promise something you have never kept," snapped out Sarah satirically.

"I never said I had kept it," answered John doggedly. "Perhaps I tried—perhaps I didn't."

Sarah took no further notice of her brother, but continuing to address Mrs. Bloggs, remarked :

"Just fancy his opening the service as he does, Sunday after Sunday, by us all a-standin' up and singing 'Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.' Just the same whether it was fine or wet, and your clothes all sodden, and your umbrella making a pool on the floor. Making us downright insincere, I call it. And then, fancy him saying he wants more reverence."

"No one," observed Mrs. Bloggs, "can say 'Praise the Lord' and 'Amen' more often than you do."

"And then finishing his sermon with 'Now to God,'" said Sarah. "It's bringing church to chapel, that's what it is. I am not going again. I am not going to sit under a man that wears a gown."

"Never mind what he wears," observed John. "He is a good fellow."

"What with his gown," continued Sarah, "and his cuffs, and his high collars! Well, it's man millinery, I call it. He don't feed me at all, dear. I should starve if I went there. I have listened to him this morning, and had no food—no real spiritual food."

"Not the true milk of the Word," observed Mrs. Bloggs.

"Ah," continued Sarah, "I want feeding every Sunday, but not with 'Now to Gods,' and singing a hymn at the end of the service as softly as if you

was afraid of the Lord hearing it, instead of throwing it off your chest properly as I like to do."

"A vesper, I heard them say it was called," remarked Mrs. Bloggs.

"We are drifting over to Rome, dear," sighed Sarah. "That is where we are going, and we shall soon be paying Peter's pence and burning candles and incense. What did you think of his sermon last Sunday?"

"Oh, about the alabaster box of spikenard ointment?" remarked Mrs. Bloggs.

"Yes; that shows how we are drifting," said Sarah. "It was a sermon on grease. That is as near as he dare go to candles, but they will follow in time. He is almost a Catholic."

"I don't care whether he is a Catholic, or what he is," observed John doggedly. "He is a good fellow."

Sarah took no notice of her brother's interruption, but remarked:

"Did you notice the minister's sister? She wears a fringe on her forehead and long curls down her back. No godly woman wears a fringe. It's dreadful, as I said. I can't go there any more; and what I shall do without a spiritual home, I don't know. And what do you think, dear," she continued; "Mr. Venner, not content with spoiling my spiritual home, is upsetting my other home. He has been twice to our cottage to see John. And John begins to like him. He always likes everybody that I don't."

The second conversation took place at the office of Grainger, Ltd., and was between Thomas Grainger (who for this year was mayor of Norencester) and Reuben Starkham, his secretary.

"You sent that letter I told you to, to that new minister of Zion Chapel—Venner, I think his name is?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you told him I should go there as yesterday?"

"I did, sir."

"I have visited every chapel in the town now, and that's the only one in which there has not been a special mention made in prayer of the mayor and corporation. I might just as well have gone to the Cathedral, and heard better music. The young man is a fraud. Pretends to be chapel, and borrows from the prayer-book. He included me, I suppose, in his prayer for all sorts and conditions of men. I might just as well have been a dock labourer. Well, his chapel is five pounds the poorer. You can make that cheque cancelled in the counterfoil. I shall tear it up."

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The following conversation, the last it is necessary to record, took place at the home of the young minister.

"I wonder what the people thought of his reverence this morning?" said Kate Venner, his sister.

"What could they think," observed Mrs. Venner, "but that Ernest will be a credit to the cause."

"Opinions differ on that matter, mother," said

Ernest Venner, smilingly, "judging by a conversation I overheard as I left the chapel."

"What did you hear?" asked his sister Kate.

"I heard one old lady ask another how she enjoyed the sermon, and she said, 'Well, it wasn't so bad, adding: 'But it's really wonderful what poor tools the Lord can make use of.'"

"Candid, but not too complimentary," observed Kate.

"It reminded me of another remark I once heard about a sermon," said Ernest, "but this time it was a little more in my favour. Two years ago, when I was a student, I preached at a country chapel, and there being no trains on the Sunday, I had to reach the place on the Saturday evening. I slept at the house of a grocer, the senior deacon. The first night I was put in the garret, not being deemed of sufficient importance to be given the best spare room. After returning from the morning service, however, I heard the deacon call out to his wife, 'The minister's not to sleep in the garret to-night!' But to me it matters not where I sleep, or what they say of me, if they will but come and listen to my message."

"I notice that Ernest delivers his message quietly; and does not *shout* in the pulpit," observed Lilian.

"I am right glad of it," said Kate.

"Ernest is cultivating a more dignified style," added Mrs. Venner.

"No; it is not that, mother," was his answer. "It's this—I *have always someone hanging on to my gown.*"

"Whatever do you mean?" said Lilian.

"I mean this," replied Ernest. "A few months ago, when waiting on a railway platform, I overheard a

gentleman—whom I believe to be Mr. Nettleby, a solicitor of this city—talking to a friend about a celebrated criminal trial that had recently taken place.”

“But what on earth has that to do with your gown?” observed Kate impatiently.

“All to do with it,” answered Ernest. “Just listen to what Mr. Nettleby said: ‘Raymond Steele,’ he observed, ‘almost *hung* that man Lumley through his shouting at the jury.’”

“Raymond Steele,” put in Mrs. Venner, “is the name of a well-known Q.C.”

“He was not well known then,” continued Ernest; “he made his name in this case. But listen to Mr. Nettleby! He went on thus: ‘When you have the judge against the prisoner, and a counsel for the defence who *shouts* at the jury—well, you might as well throw up the defence at once.’”

“But what has that to do with your gown?” again interrupted Kate.

“Listen further,” said Ernest, “to Mr. Nettleby: ‘The jury in this case disagreed. When the second trial came on, I was against employing the same counsel; but the prisoner and his friends strongly wished it, so I yielded; but I gave Mr. Steele my opinion about his style of oratory. Strange to say, he took it all right. He told me afterwards that he had said to his junior: “If you hear me raise my voice above its normal pitch, pull my gown.” Well, his gown only had to be pulled *once*. He spoke very quietly—an incisive, earnest, forceful speech—which carried to the jury the strong conviction held by the counsel of the prisoner’s innocence. A verdict of “Not guilty” followed.’ Well, this set me thinking,”

continued Ernest, "whether noisy declamation from the pulpit carries conviction to the pew any more than it did to the jury. I decided that it did not, and now—in imagination—I have always someone behind me ready to pull my gown."

It is just possible that some of my readers may wish that their parsons had a gown-pulling hand behind them !

CHAPTER XVIII

THE IRON FOUNDRY: PHIL RESUMES

AFTER an absence of more than two years I was again back in Burstone. John was very pleased, of course, to see me, but wondered much why I had returned. I never told him, nor did Sarah, and for once she showed some sympathy for her brother and much common-sense. I found Burstone practically as I had left it, but how small it and Norencester seemed compared to the larger world I had been in.

Maggie was still away, but the school would be breaking up directly, and she was coming home for her last holiday before leaving us to enter permanently the home of Mr. Grainger, who was to adopt her.

Of course, I could not remain at home idle, so I set about to find something to do that would leave me free to spend all my evenings with John. It was then he needed a companion to influence him for his good.

I heard, through John, that a young clerk was needed at Strenbury's Foundry at Norencester.

Zachariah Strenbury was a Quaker, and the head of the firm of Strenbury & Strenbury, Norencester, iron founders and makers of engines and machinery, a very wealthy firm, employing nearly two thousand hands. John had heard Mr. Strenbury asking for

someone with a knowledge of French. It was not so common then in the commercial world as it is now. The clerk who did the firm's French correspondence had just left them. John overheard this when he went there to attend to their horses.

I went off early one morning by the carrier's cart that had so often conveyed me to school, and with some timidity I entered the large gates of Strenbury & Strenbury. As I went in I observed the word "Office" on a door on my left, and I saw immediately in front of me, printed on a large sheet of cardboard and hung up on the wall: "Friend, despatch thy business and depart." As I glanced at it an old gentleman came in behind me, and seeing me, he said: "Well, what dost thee want?" I told him that I had heard he needed a clerk who understood French.

"Thou art much too young for us," he answered, looking at me keenly. "What dost thee know? Nothing but schoolboy French? Our need is of one not only to write and read it, but speak it too. We oft have Frenchmen here to buy, with whom we need converse. Such an one oft knoweth not our language, nor we his."

I told him I could both write and speak French, and that I had been resident two years in Paris.

"Thou art young to have so seen the world. Canst thou read this?" he asked, producing a letter for me to translate.

I managed to translate it with accuracy, for fortunately there was little in it of a technical character to puzzle me. The gentleman seemed pleased.

"What wages might thee want?" he asked.

I forget now what I asked. I suppose not much, for he assented without demur. And then he said :

“What reference hast thee for character?”

I told him he could write to my late employer, and I took care to give him the name of the father, and not the son. I was engaged, subject to the reference, which was duly written for. The reply was deemed satisfactory, and on the Monday following my visit I commenced my new duties at Strenbury & Strenbury's Foundry.

Mr. Zachariah Strenbury was a very big man, over six feet high, and strong as the iron he manufactured. I was much impressed by the enormous size of his boots, and of John's remark when he once came to see me there. Pointing to them, he said in an aside to me: “Two feet one yard.” A couple of his strides seemed to take him across the yard, which took me quite four. I noticed also that he wore a wig, and they said at the Foundry the older he got the younger grew the wig. Everything about the man seemed on a large scale—his broad-brimmed hat, his large pocket-book, his bulky purse always well filled, his appetite and the food he ate—everything was large except his pride, and of this he had none, save that great self-respect which characterises the Quaker.

Everything about the foundry, too, seemed to copy its master, and was large. The huge hammers, the steam cranes and lifts that the machinery made, the powerful traction engines in the yards, the large coal trucks and strong cart-horses, the ponderous ledgers in the office, and alas! the many accidents that occurred. These last were dreadfully large in

number and in kind. It was before the days of Factory Acts, and machinery was left in a very unprotected condition compared to what it is to-day. Accidents were of frequent occurrence, and it became part of my duty, in course of my time, to render first aid to the injured. I remember that we kept in the office a supply of lint, large rolls of bandages, and ointment. I used to order the lint in rolls of a dozen yards in length. We had many accidents. I remember on one occasion a boy coming into the office with his thumb quite severed, save by a piece of thin skin by which it hung. "Don't it look funny!" he said, holding up his hand, and the next moment the poor fellow had fainted.

It was part of my duties to deal with the men's time-sheets, and for this purpose I had a revolving cylinder, a sort of calculating machine. I just had to turn it round, and I saw in a moment what I wanted. It was really a species of ready-reckoner, which revolved in sections. Another thing I had to do was to deduct from the men's wages anything that had been advanced to them, and that was being repaid in weekly instalments. This was before the days of the Truck Act, I may mention, and certain things were legal then which would not be in these days. It was the custom of the firm to make advances to workmen who required it, of various sums, from one to five pounds, provided they could find among the employes of the firm two securities. These advances were made to meet special cases, such as a sudden illness, a funeral, or any unforeseen call on a workman's purse.

I remember there was one man employed in the

works, a careless, reckless sort of fellow, who was also in bad repute with his fellow-workmen. I recall an incident in reference to this man which illustrates the kindly heart and love of quiet humour that characterised old Zachariah Strenbury. The workman's name was Tommie Tupper; and Tommie Tupper's wife had presented him with twins, whereas infant clothing had been provided out of Tommie's scanty purse for one child only. The man came to me with his tale of woe, and asked for the "advance ticket," which it was my duty to write out. He wanted one pound.

"Well," said I, "where are your securities? Tell me these, and I will put the matter before the firm." Tommie could only find one. I said: "It is no use; one won't do," and I shut up the book.

While I was talking to the man, old Zachariah was leaning against a desk in the further end of the office. Tommie went up to him and related his misfortune, for as such he regarded it. Turning to me, the old man said:

"Well, can't he have it?"

"No, sir," I said. "He can only find one security."

"Only one security! Must have another," he said very gravely. Then he added, with a twinkle of the eye I remember so well: "Dost thee think they would take me for the other one?"

I was about to open my book and make out the necessary ticket when Mr. Strenbury stopped me.

"Wait a little," he said; then turning to the man, he said: "Tupper, thee really must manage these things better in the future. Just thee think of it—TWINS!" And he shook his head very gravely.

"TWINS!" he repeated, and walked out of the office. But he slipped a sovereign on to my desk—a gift for the man.

It was some weeks after I had been at the Foundry that a gentleman called to see Mr. Strenbury. He was dressed in clerical clothing, and though looking much older, I recognised him as the man who had spoken to John so kindly some years ago. He asked to see the head of the firm.

"Are you not Mr. Venner?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered, with surprise; "but how did you know it? I have only just taken up my residence at Norencester."

I told him of the way we had met some years ago.

"And now, if you will take a seat," I said, "I will go and tell the head of the firm."

"I won't keep him long," he said, and pointed to the notice on the wall.

"'Friend, despatch thy business and depart,'" said Ernest Venner, reading it aloud.

"What might thy business be, friend?"

The speaker was Zachariah Strenbury, who had entered the office behind us.

Ernest Venner smiled, and said:

"I have just come to Norencester. My name is Ernest Venner: I hope you are well."

"Thank thee, fairly well. There is full much of me," he added, looking down at his portly person, "to be all well at once. Dost thou not think so?"

Ernest Venner smiled.

"Is it private converse thee might want?" asked Mr. Strenbury.

"Oh, dear, no!" answered the other. "The most

public there can be. I want your permission to say a few words to your men, once a week, in their dinner-hour. I want to speak to them of Christ."

"Thou wilt find them rough," said Mr. Strenbury. "Some, I know, have little courtesy, and will give thee, I fear, a reception not very polite. There are two thousand men here, and amongst them are some very, very bad characters, but the worst characters are sometimes the best workmen. Thou hast my permission willingly, but take care, some of them are of the roughest; add prudence to thy zeal."

"I am a timid man," said Ernest Venner, "save when Christ bids me speak, and He bids me speak to them. Thank you for your permission; that is all I want. I will obey the request of yonder card and leave you."

"Thou takest with thee my prayers for thy work and thy welfare," said Zachariah Strenbury.

The following day, a large bill-poster was stuck on a board, and hung on the iron gates of the Foundry, announcing that Ernest Venner would talk to the men on Thursday next, from 1.30 to 2 o'clock, on "The Purpose of Life."

I attended his first talk with them, and saw to my great regret that the men resented his coming. Mr. Venner mounted a small stool from which to address them, and was met with derisive cheers and laughter. Some dirty water was squirted into his face, whilst a dead cat and rotten eggs were thrown at him. "Down with the damn parson!" called out some. "Hull him out of the yard!" cried another. "I'll show you. Come on, mates!" and the man laid a rough hand on the parson's arm. I took hold of him to pull him

backwards, but was shaken off in a moment. But a stronger hand than mine was laid on his shoulder. He was instantly pulled back, and a voice I knew so well said: "What's to do here? Mates, ain't you ashamed of yourselves? Let's give the parson fair-play." The speaker was Doctor John. In a moment he turned the tide. John's fearless courage was well known in Norencester. He had often come into contact with the workmen, too; and his strong personality, his indomitable will, had always made an impression on them.

"Look here, mates," said John. "This here parson means well. He ain't paid for the job, and I'm blarmed if it's very nice work either, by the look of that dead cat over there and the egg-stains on his coat. You have given him a warm welcome, and no mistake. Now, as you have had your innin's like, won't you let him have his?"

"We will, mate," cried a few.

"Us will," said another.

"Three cheers for the parson!" shouted one.

These and other remarks greeted the ear of Ernest Venner.

"Now, sir, you get on the stool again," said John. "You be the parson, and I will stand by you and be the clerk, and if I say 'amen' in the wrong place, you will have to tell me. Lor! I haven't heard a parson preach for many a day. I don't go to church, so the church come to me."

His rough and ready humour completely turned the men to the side of Ernest Venner, and they gave him an attentive hearing. He spoke well; clear, practical common-sense, not above the men's

understanding, and expressed in plain, simple language. The only fault I thought was an entire absence of humour, which always takes such strong hold upon the masses, and when properly applied, will give strong point to an argument. But he did not weary them; the address was brief, thoughtful, and in parts almost pathetic.

When he had finished speaking, he thanked John, and drawing his arm through his, walked away with him.

"That's the sort of parson I like," said one. "He don't set himself above the likes of we, do he?"

As Ernest Venner walked away, he said to John:

"I am so glad to see you again, glad to hear that you are climbing the ladder."

"I am not very high up yet," said John, with just a touch of sadness in his voice; "and I have fallen off the rungs several times, and had to begin again. But those few kind words you said to me years ago, they did help me. I ain't forgot 'em, and I never shall."

As Ernest Venner went away, he showed, by a remark he made, that he too had not forgotten either what John had said to him in Holden's Wood.

"Good-bye!" he said, with a smile. "You did that 'blarmed parson' a good turn to-day."

CHAPTER XIX

THE CALL OF THE BOUNDER

IN a dingy side street of Norencester, within five minutes' walk of Zion Chapel, resided its new pastor, Ernest Venner.

It was nearly eleven o'clock one week day that Mrs. Venner, her son, and two daughters, were seated round the only fire that was burning in the house. They were in a little, dull parlour.

Kate Venner was looking at the advertisements in the newspaper. Presently she said :

"By the way, mother, I had a shot at that Mansion one the other day, although you said 'No.'"

"Shot at it! What do you mean? When will you leave off speaking slang?" said Mrs. Venner.

"I mean I have answered the old chap's advertisement."

The "old chap's" advertisement was as follows :

"Wanted, a person under thirty, to be companion to a young lady. Must be stylish and dress well. Wages, £100 a year. Apply, by letter only, to Thomas Grainger, Esquire, The Mansion, Rushmere."

"I think I advised you not to," observed Mrs. Venner ; "but I really forget now what it was. But

then, you are not likely to get it. It was a high salary, was it not?"

"Hundred a year screw," said Kate Venner. "Topping, I call it."

"Screw! Dreadfully vulgar. I said before you are really not fit for a young lady's companion. Those two years in London seem to have spoiled you. Don't you think so, Ernest?"

"She will give up that way of speaking soon, I think, as she knows it vexes you," observed Ernest.

"Kate means all right," said Lilian, a younger sister about sixteen. "Don't be hard on her, mother. It does sound so funny to hear her talk."

"When did you answer the advertisement?" inquired Mrs. Venner.

"Yesterday. I just knocked off half-a-dozen lines, and said I was willing to take the job on."

"Take the job on," repeated Mrs. Venner. "If you put that in your letter, it is very certain you won't take the job on. Any gentleman would at once conclude that the writer was very vulgar, and consign the letter to the waste-paper basket."

"Pitch it on the fire, you mean, mother," observed Kate, with a smile. "Well, the letter has gone, and if I don't get it, I don't. I shall try another. I am not going to stay at home kicking up my heels about here doing nothing but skulk all day. I hate loafing about at home."

"I don't think you are old enough, nor steady enough, for such a responsibility," said Mrs. Venner.

"I assure you, mother, I shall make a most staid companion, and excellent chaperon. I know what,

mother ; I will sport glasses, and put back my fringe, and wear an elderly bonnet, and talk very slowly and precisely, and—well, I'll do anything to make the bounder fork out the tin and take me on."

"Kate!" cried her mother, holding her hands to her ears, "what have you said? 'Make the bounder fork out the tin and take you on'?"

"It sounds awfully jolly to talk like that," observed Lilian.

"There is Lilian now using slang. You have contaminated her," observed Mrs. Venner.

As she was speaking a carriage drew up at the door, and a gentleman jumped out.

"Who can he be? Look! he is opening the gate and coming here," said Lilian.

"I shouldn't be a bit surprised if it was the bounder I wrote to yesterday," observed Kate.

Kate was right. It was the "bounder," and he was now ushered into the little drawing-room. The one maid-of-all-work entered the room, bearing in her hand a card, on which was engraved :

THOMAS GRAINGER, ESQ.,

THE MANSION,

RUSHMERE.

Mrs. Venner took it from the servant and read it aloud.

"That is the bounder, mother. Let me go," exclaimed Kate.

"Certainly not," answered Mrs. Venner. "I will interview him alone first."

"But it isn't you he wants to see, but me," observed Kate, as her mother was quitting the room. Then she called out after her: "Now don't go and crab the deal."

Mrs. Venner entered the other room, and bowed graciously to Mr. Grainger, who looked at her with marked surprise and disapproval. Mr. Grainger had said to the servant: "Ask the young person to be sharp, I am in a hurry."

Mrs. Venner now motioned Mr. Grainger to a seat, which he did not take, and said:

"I shall be pleased to discuss the matter with you, sir."

"Yes; but I shan't with you," blurted out Mr. Grainger. "Thirty can be stretched a bit, you know, but hang it all—"

"Beg pardon, I don't understand you," answered Mrs. Venner, amazed.

"Well, mum, if you force me to be plain with you, I said thirty, and you are sixty, if you are a day."

"Sir, that is a most insulting remark, and I must beg you to leave," said Mrs. Venner, with offended dignity, as she rose from her seat.

"Leave! Of course I will; wasting my time. What do you mean by writing me you are under thirty?" and he threw down Kate's letter upon the table.

"It is my daughter who writes she is under thirty," said Mrs. Venner stiffly.

"Beg pardon, beg pardon, mum! I must apologise. Let me see your daughter, then."

Mrs. Venner was much annoyed, but she reflected that Kate had been at home two months idle already, and money was scarce. Ernest's pastorate was a very poor one; the salary now offered was large; and then there was the champing of bits outside, and she felt how grand it would be for her daughter to ride about in a carriage like that, perhaps even calling and taking her out. So she curbed her rising anger, and called her daughter, whispering in her ear:

"He is a very vulgar man, my dear, and very rude."

Kate entered with her mother and bowed. Mr. Grainger rose from his seat and also bowed.

"Well," he said, looking at her critically, "I suppose you are the writer of this letter. I don't want to interview the whole family, you know. You are young—not more than thirty, I said in my advertisement—you are not over twenty."

"Twenty-four," answered Kate.

"Don't look it," observed Mr. Grainger bluntly. "Still, I will take your word for it. Never heard a woman over-state her age yet. Now, I suppose you want a few particulars?"

"If you please," answered Kate.

"Well, here we are: I live at The Mansion. Household consists of housekeeper, age unknown, say fifty; three female servants, any age you like; coachman and footman. My wife is dead; best monument in Rushmere Churchyard; perhaps you have seen it—solid marble, cost a thousand. Next, I adopt a daughter, name Maggie Sturge, now in Hampstead School finishing her education; she will

be finished in a fortnight. Then she has a holiday with a relation—a doctor. Your duty will be that of companion to her; see she is never dull. Can you play?"

"A little."

"Show us your style," said Mr. Grainger, pointing to the piano.

Kate played a lively movement from a comic opera.

"Sing," said Mr. Grainger. "Anything—just a verse."

Kate sang a plaintive Scotch song. Mr. Grainger stopped her in the middle of it.

"Too doleful; voice all right. Buy some more songs at once with more go in them, and practise them," and he threw a sovereign down on the table. "You can row, I suppose, and skate, and ride, and dance, and all that?"

"I can do some of them," was the reply.

"What you can't do, you must learn. Now then, do you think the crib will suit you?" he asked, taking out his watch.

"I think it will do stunningly," answered Kate.

"You must excuse my daughter's expressions," observed Mrs. Venner, "but she has resided in London for two years in most Bohemian society, and its speech still clings to her."

"That's nothing," observed Mr. Grainger, waving his hand grandiloquently. "I like a smart answer from a girl who has knocked about a bit in the world."

"There is one other question not been touched upon," observed Mrs. Venner. "Her late employer

is dead, but her uncle, Canon Thorley, would, I am sure, be pleased to act as reference."

"Character be bothered!" observed Mr. Grainger. "When I clap my eyes on a girl, I soon know whether she is the sort to pick a man's pocket. I don't want a character from any canon. And now," he said, rising, "I think there is nothing more to say. My housekeeper will come for you in the carriage this day six weeks, and take you direct to The Mansion."

With that he bowed, shook hands with Kate (not with her mother), and strode to his carriage.

"He is a snob," exclaimed Kate. "But I shall manage the bounder all right once I get into harness there."

With that remark, she picked up the sovereign, spun it in the air with her thumb, and caught the coin as it descended.

"Very ladylike," observed Mrs. Venner. "Doubtless one of the accomplishments you will teach your young charge at The Mansion. You will most certainly increase in vulgarity of speech while there."

But here Mrs. Venner was wrong. The slang words which had so captivated her daughter when uttered by the rather brilliant girls Kate had met in the West End seemed altogether to lose their charm when spoken by the coarse, vulgar Mr. Grainger. Her mother could not have given her a better antidote had she searched the world over.

CHAPTER XX

THE NEW HOME

MAGGIE had finished her two years' schooling, and was spending her last holiday at Burstone prior to taking up her residence with Mr. Grainger at The Mansion. She was to have a whole month at home first. Mr. Grainger, who was impatient, said a fortnight, but as Maggie wished for at least a month, Doctor John said it was to be as she wished.

Previous to Maggie's return there had been an interview between Doctor John and Mr. Grainger. It was at the cottage of the former. Mr. Grainger leant back in the chair, folded his arms, and said :

"I take her with the understanding that you now relinquish all claim to her ; you are not to come and see her, nor is she to come and see you. In fact, you and all here are to be as if dead to her."

"I consent," replied Doctor John, "*if*—" and he laid great stress upon the word.

"If," interrupted Mr. Grainger. "There can be no 'ifs' in the matter."

"Yes," answered Doctor John ; "there is just a little 'if,' you know, only a little one, but it makes all the difference."

"Well, what is it? Out with it," returned Mr. Grainger.

"If we are dead," said Doctor John, "in Maggie's thoughts, in her heart, in her love, she will leave off coming to see us, and we to visit her."

"You don't understand," said Mr. Grainger, "that so long as you keep on seeing her, she won't forget you. You won't be what I want you to be—dead to her."

"It's a pity; but I can't order my coffin at any particular date, just to oblige you," returned Doctor John.

"I mean dead, figuratively speaking," answered Mr. Grainger, in tones of annoyance.

"Well, you know," observed Doctor John, "it is something to know we are only to be dead figuratively, ain't it?"

"I don't think we seem to be understanding one another," observed Mr. Grainger. "I want to make Maggie forget you, and all here."

Doctor John rose from his chair.

"As you drove along," he asked, "did you see a stream of water a-springin' up in the road? You must have crossed it. It comes up clear and sparklin', and you may tread on't all you like, but you can't keep it down. That's how it is with the love in Maggie's heart. It will well up somewheres."

"Dear me! you are quite an orator," said Mr. Grainger sarcastically.

"Yes; I were born so," answered Doctor John. "I came into the world a-squallin', and, like a child, I always squeal at anyone I don't like."

"And you don't like me?"

"No; I don't," said Doctor John. "Why should I?"

"Candid, but not complimentary. Let's get back to business. I adhere to my terms. Do you accept them?"

"Most certainly not," answered Doctor John. "On the contrary, I shall only let her go to you on the distinct understanding she is free to come here whenever she chooses, and that I may visit her whensomever I want."

"Preposterous!" exclaimed Mr. Grainger. "Most preposterous!"

"I think different, that is all," was Doctor John's quiet reply. "If my terms won't do, we will end the matter."

"It's absurd! You can't be coming into my drawing-room every day you want to," answered Mr. Grainger. "I don't want to be offensive, but can't you see the difference in our social position? To say one man is as good as another is all bosh, you know. All bosh!"

"Undoubtedly!" answered Doctor John. "I agree with you, one man ain't as good as another. The difference is often terribl' marked. It is in our case. I'm blarmed if it ain't!"

"Quite so; quite so!" observed Mr. Grainger, unconscious of the irony in John's speech.

"I have no wish," continued Doctor John, "for to go into yur drawin'-room. When I do come, the kitchen will do for me, or even the stable. I like horses, they are always good company. I might not say the same of everybody at The Mansion."

Mr. Grainger was annoyed, but he saw very clearly that it was no use to try to bully or browbeat Doctor John. He was more than a match for him, in mind,

in tongue, and in muscle. Doctor John could have put him on his back in the twinkling of an eye, as Mr. Grainger knew from practical experience, so he curbed his tongue.

"Well," he said at length, "if it comes to that, I must accept your terms, but don't come oftener than you can help."

"I shan't come at all," answered Doctor John, "unless Maggie wishes it."

"Ah! she won't wish that long," he answered, with an air of self-assurance, as he walked out of the cottage.

"Wait a bit. Who have you got for a companion to her?" asked Doctor John. "I am going to know a few things first."

"Miss Kate Venner of Norencester."

"Is that the sister of the minister?"

"I think it is."

"I like Mr. Venner," answered Doctor John. "That is something in your favour; but there is another matter yet."

"What?" asked Mr. Grainger impatiently.

"It is this. I wish my sister to go over and see your housekeeper, and have some talk with her. I am going to be satisfied that everything is as it should be before I let Maggie go."

"Good God, man!" called out Mr. Grainger. "You don't think I could have any harmful intention to my own daugh—I mean, my adopted daughter."

"I don't think anything," answered John. "I am just going to inquire into everything, that is all."

At length the last day of Maggie's holiday arrived. Doctor John did not go on his round that morning,

and his mare in the stable stamped her feet and scraped the ground with her hoof, as though impatiently waiting her master's step. Maggie's boxes, packed by Sarah with utmost exactitude, and corded by Doctor John, stood waiting in the narrow passage by the front door.

"And now, Maggie, if you don't feel happy in the big house, and don't love them, and they don't love you, come back, my child, come back. This is only a cottage, but there is love in it. If it is a bit rough, it is ready."

Maggie's only answer was to sit down and cry.

"Catch me crying in a cottage, when I could laugh in a mansion," said Sarah.

"You will be happy," said John cheerily. "At least, I think so, and it will be a great advance for you in life. You must come and see us very often. Lor! to think what a lady you will be."

"And you must come and see me," said Maggie.

"Some day," answered Doctor John, "when you wish it, my dear."

"Oh, I shall count on coming back to see you."

"Not more than we shall. But listen! I think that is the carriage."

Sarah went to the gate, and in a minute or so came back, saying, in ironical tones: "My lady's carriage waits."

As she spoke, Maggie heard the carriage stop at the gate. She threw her arms round John's neck, and clung to him in an embrace that was half affection and half hysteria. Leaving home to begin a new life among strangers, and in new surroundings, was too much for the child, for though eighteen in

years, in herself she did not seem more than a child of fourteen.

A young lady came to the door and rapped. Doctor John unloosened Maggie's arms and went forward.

"My name is Kate Venner," said the young lady.

"Come inside," said Doctor John, and he led her into the room in which Maggie stood, much agitated and with tearful eyes.

"I am Kate Venner," repeated the young lady, "and I have come for Miss Sturge. What! crying? Oh, buck up, old girl! You will soon be all right. It's a ripping fine carriage to ride back in, and I am sure we shall get on well together, and have some high old times. Why, we can spin over here as often as you like. You are not leaving home, but just going away for a few days' change, that is all, you know."

As she rattled on, Maggie saw a footman come into the little passage—it was too insignificant to call a hall—and pick up her boxes and carry them out to the carriage. So there was nothing to do but to kiss John again and go. He went with her into the road, and held her arm as she got into the carriage. As it drove away, Maggie looked back tearfully at John till the high-stepping horses took her out of view.

"He's a decent sort, that uncle of yours," said Kate.

"He is not my uncle," answered Maggie; "but he could not be kinder if he were."

"A vast improvement on the bounder at The Mansion, at any rate," exclaimed Kate.

Maggie made no reply. She was thinking how, years ago, she had thought how grand it would be to loll back on the cushions and ride in a carriage like this; but now, alas! how different it seemed.

As the carriage vanished from his sight, Doctor John went slowly indoors. "I shall miss my little ewe lamb," he said sadly.

But there was one waiting to give the ewe lamb a welcome. Let justice be done to Mr. Grainger. It was an honest, hearty welcome—the best that he, in his coarse, vulgar way, could give to anyone. All his intentions as regards Maggie were honourable. There was no such stuff in his thoughts as had cast a dark and momentary shadow on John's mind.

As the carriage neared, he stood on the marble steps of The Mansion, clad in a lavender morning-coat, and a speckled silk vest, with a rare exotic in his buttonhole. He listened for the sound of the carriage which was to bring him his new daughter. He had just inspected a little boudoir that he had newly furnished for her. It was costly and gaudy, and he was satisfied with it. As he heard the sound of the approaching vehicle, he walked down the steps into the garden, and was going to the gate to meet it, when it occurred to him that the action might perhaps seem too effusive to be dignified, so he went back to the top of the stone stairs and awaited her there.

"Welcome, Maggie; welcome," he said, "to The Mansion. I hope everything here will give you satisfaction. I am sure it must."

"Thank you!" said Maggie. "I am sure it will."

But there was little spirit or heart in what she said. He quite expected she would admire everything, and be in raptures of joy at the surroundings of her new home. He led her round the house and through the grounds, talking as he went along.

"You never have known," he observed, "what capital is, what capital can do. Now you see it. See this piano? It cost two hundred pounds, and that mother-of-pearl table I bought myself when I put the brokers into Lord Durton's house for the money he borrowed of me on mortgage and failed to pay. You never knew Lord Durton. He snubbed me once. I never forgave him. It is always a dangerous thing to snub capital—which is me."

"Yes," answered Maggie simply.

Mr. Grainger mentioned the price of one or two articles, and continued to boast as they went along.

At length there was a pause in the conversation, and then it occurred to Maggie she must call this man something, and the thing was what? So she said to him:

"What shall I call you, sir?"

"I adopt you," he answered; "you are my daughter." (Maggie shuddered.) "Call me father." Then he thought a moment, and said: "No; call me Guardian."

"Thank you, Guardian," said Maggie, with an effort.

"I hope," said Mr. Grainger, "you will like the young person I have engaged as your companion."

"Miss Venner?" put in Maggie.

"If she doesn't, you will have only to say the word,

and off she goes in a moment, or anybody, for the matter of that. You are mistress here now—my adopted daughter.”

Poor Maggie shuddered again.

They were now in the grounds. As they entered the house they met the housekeeper, Jael Naylor, a lady, stiff, prim, and starchy. Now Jael had made up her mind from the start that she should dislike Maggie, and she thought it would be hard work to conceal her resentment. But when she saw the young, sweet, and now almost tearful face of the girl, her heart went out at once to her future mistress, and she welcomed her with a firm, hearty handshake.

“Jael will conduct you to your bedroom,” said Mr. Grainger, and Maggie followed her, glad of the relief.

It seemed such a large, grand bedroom, compared to any she had hitherto been in; and although Maggie seemed somewhat lost in it, she could not help feeling a certain amount of pride as she looked at all its grandeur, and felt this was all her own. Presently she caught sight of herself in her silken dress reflected in a large cheval mirror. Then she opened a wardrobe and found it full of dresses, and things just made for her. She remembered being fitted for them, and was now anxious to try them on, and see how they became her. It would be all very nice, splendid, if there was no Mr. Grainger.

“The gong for lunch will go in ten minutes,” said Jael, as she withdrew.

This meal was a sad trial to Maggie, for Mr. Grainger, lunched at home that day in honour of her coming. She said little, and was very grateful to Kate Venner (whom she was beginning to like, in

spite of her slangy self-introduction), for doing all the talking that was necessary to fill up the pauses in Mr. Grainger's self-laudation. Before the meal was half through, Maggie had heard how he rose from a penny, but he quite forgot to mention the four thousand pounds, his wife's legacy.

The dinner was equally as great a trial to Maggie, perhaps more so, for it was of longer duration, but the greatest trial of all was yet in store for her. It was when the time came to say good-night. She went up to Mr. Grainger, and with extended hand, said simply: "Good-night!"

He took her hand and drew her to him, then letting it go, placed both hands on her shoulders, and bending down, kissed her. It was done in a fatherly way, and well meant, but Maggie felt herself shudder as his lips touched hers. Her arms and hands, that so often had been thrown in a tightened grasp round John's neck, half of affection, half of girlish glee, hung limp before her. All the man's gold would never cause them to do otherwise, and as for his love, there was none in his nature to waken hers. He was proud of her because she was beautiful, and he would be able to say: "This is mine, acquired by my industry, my perseverance, and my capital." But he would never be able to say she is mine, gained by love. His heart had no such thought—it had been rooted out by his pursuit of gold.

When Maggie said her prayers that night, there was one man's name fondly remembered in them, but it was not the one who, in his mansion now, showered on her his wealth, but the poor man in the cottage, who gave her more—his love.

CHAPTER XXI

"THE CHAP THAT SPOUTS"

BUT after a few weeks, Maggie became more reconciled to her home. Mr. Grainger, coarse and offensive to everyone, was never so to her. He was as courteous as his vulgar nature would permit; indeed, he was more than this, he was kind, considerate, and thoughtful. Already he was very fond of her, and it showed itself in many ways. Every morning before going to his business he would go into his conservatory, and plucking the most costly flower, give it to her. On his return at night, he would always bring back with him some rare fruit, costly sweets, or choice scents, or perhaps a book which he always chose for its bright binding, and seldom bought without trying to beat the shopman down in price.

Doctor John had never told Maggie how offensive Mr. Grainger had been to him, nor how the man had spoken as if her love was to be bought like a prize pig at a fair. He saw no reason to tell her. It would only have made her unhappy, so he kept it "tenable in his silence."

There were other circumstances that contributed to make Maggie happier. One was that Jael had taken kindly to her; another, that she was charmed

with the genial vivacity of Kate Venner. Then it was nice to taste the sweets of affluence, to dress in silks and laces, to wear costly jewels, to loll back at ease in a luxurious carriage, to eat and drink the choicest foods and beverages. And then it was grand to preside as hostess at The Mansion, for Mr. Grainger gave balls and garden parties, as the season of the year would permit. And they did not dance to a single piano, often indifferently played, as so many of the poorer gentry did. Oh, no! Mr. Grainger engaged a good military band for the lawn, and a select small orchestra for the ball-room. Thus the first year was one ceaseless round of gaiety, and Maggie, who seemed in that period to have left girlhood behind her, had suddenly bloomed into a very beautiful woman. Was it surprising that she should be happy? Surprising either that the little cottage at Burstone should at times be almost forgotten?

Mr. Grainger was never so happy, nor so proud, as when he introduced her as "my daughter" to the *élite* of the county society, who assembled at The Mansion. For, with few exceptions, society did go there. It held aloof for the first dance only, but as Lord and Lady Donnington attended, the lesser magnates soon followed. Lord Donnington was well under the capitalist's thumb, but Mr. Grainger kept this quiet. If any further inducement was needed, it was the report that the capitalist had adopted Maggie as his daughter, and she was young and pretty, and of marriageable age.

On every hand, Maggie was petted, courted, admired, and flattered. Thus, the one bad trait

in her character, her vanity, was abundantly fostered and fed, so much so, that there came a day when riding in the Grainger carriage with Lady Donnington for a companion, she met Doctor John walking in the road, dressed in his usual coarse, workaday clothing, and she passed him with a bow. This did not happen until she had been there quite two years. At first she drove over frequently to see him, and then at longer intervals. But she never asked Doctor John to go and see her, and he never went uninvited.

Perhaps there was something else that tended also to obliterate the little home at Burstone from Maggie's thoughts. On one occasion, when there was to be a garden party at The Mansion, Mr. Grainger had said to Kate Venner: "You can ask your mother if you like, and your brother—the chap that spouts at Zion Chapel, I mean—I don't know if you have any other brothers. Just show them how we can do it here, you know. It will be a bit of a treat for them." If Mr. Grainger spoke to, or of, any one whom he considered socially his inferior—and such he considered Ernest and Kate Venner—he always lapsed into slang.

The invitation was at once sent home. Kate Venner had then been at The Mansion only a few months, and she felt the invitation was intended as kindness to her, though so coarsely expressed. She wrote as follows :

"DEAR MOTHER,—We are going to have a big flare-up here next week—a garden party. Over a hundred guests are to be invited. A tip-top military

band is coming from London, and there will be strawberries and cream, and ices, and all that sort of thing *ad lib*. It will be awfully jolly. Mr. Grainger has kindly invited you and Ernest, 'the chap that spouts at Zion Chapel.' (Won't E. feel flattered?) I really think I begin to hate slang. Now, do come; do make Ernest bring you. I am getting on fine here. Much love. "KATE.

"P.S.—I can manage the old bounder well, and as for Maggie, I like her better every day. She is a love of a girl. Ernest would like her. Toodle-oo."

"I am afraid you will not much care about this, Ernest," observed Mrs. Venner, passing over the letter to her son.

"Surely you would not care to go, mother?" returned Ernest.

"I should," was the answer. "You see, we shall meet all the best people of the county."

"Who would not have a word to say to us," returned Ernest.

"I am not so sure. You would be quite as good as many who will be there, and better than some, and we should be sure to be well looked after by Kate."

"It is three months since I have seen Kate," observed Ernest reflectively.

"Yes; you were out the last time she called with Miss Grainger."

To see the "best people" was not the only motive with Mrs. Venner. She wanted Ernest to see Maggie, but she knew it would be quite unwise to hint at any such thing.

"You don't often take me out," observed Mrs. Venner presently.

"And you really wish to go, mother?"

"I should much like it. We seem to go nowhere."

"Except to hear his reverence preach," observed Lilian, who had just come into the room, and liked a quiet joke at her brother's expense.

"I don't forget that, my dear," returned her mother.

In truth, Mrs. Venner did not. It was the proudest moment of her life when she first "sat under" her son at chapel.

"Well, mother, if you have set your heart on going, I will take you. As you say, I don't often take you out. I am shy and nervous, as you know. I would sooner talk to five hundred people from the pulpit than four or five on a lawn. Still, I will go."

"Thank you!" said Mrs. Venner approvingly.

When the day arrived, Mrs. Venner put on her best things, and then surveyed herself in the glass, as critically, and in the end as proudly, as any young girl in her teens.

They were to go by train to Rushmere Station, which would take them within half a mile of The Mansion, when they would have to walk, as being only a small country place, no cabs would be in waiting. So Ernest and his mother set off, and arrived there somewhat dusty after their walk. Mrs. Venner perceived, as she neared the gates, that carriages were going to or returning from The Mansion in great numbers. There were few pedestrians among the guests, for money was much in evidence.

"I think, mother," said Ernest as they entered, this is not quite our world; or, at all events, not

mine. My grave face here will be like Hamlet's 'nighted colour' at the Danish Court—out of place."

"Not so; not so," answered Mrs. Venner. "Look! there is Kate, and she has seen us."

"I am jolly glad you have come," exclaimed Kate. "Let's see; I must first take you to Mr. Grainger, and then to Maggie—Miss Grainger, I suppose I ought to say to you—and then introduce you to Mr. Lamthorne, the vicar of Rushmere. There are no dissenting ministers here to introduce you to, but you must not talk about Disestablishment, and quarrel with him. Ernest, will you?"

"I shall not do that," said Ernest. "I am no enemy of the Church."

"Ah, here is Mr. Grainger," said Kate. "This is my mother, Mr. Grainger; and this my brother, Mr. Ernest Venner." Then, in an aside to Ernest, as Mr. Grainger was shaking hands with Mrs. Venner: "The chap that spouts at Zion Chapel."

"Venner," said Mr. Grainger (he always called people by their surnames without the prefix of Mr., immediately he was introduced, unless they were much his superior in social status), "you will have to talk to old Lamthorne; he is the only one here in the soul-saving line, but there won't be any jealousy to-day as to who is to say grace, because we shan't have any. Lamthorne is all right, but a bit too long in knocking through the church service. Brown over at Burstead does it in ten minutes less—that's why I generally go there now. I might give you a turn if you were nearer, and not too weak and washy in the sermon line."

"I fear I should be," said Ernest, somewhat stiffly.

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"Very likely—very likely; sloppy sermons, like sloppy puddings, still stick to the cloth," and Mr. Grainger laughed loudly at his own joke. "Not bad that. Make your sermons as smart as that, and I will come and hear you. Have you been introduced to my daughter?" asked Mr. Grainger.

"No; not yet," was the reply.

"Ah, I will do so. Come with me, young man." As they went along, Mr. Grainger said: "Now you take a tip from me—a man as has been a success in the world, to a young fellow just startin' life—spice your sermons up a bit, like a music-hall artiste does his gag; that will make them go down."

What a coarse man he was! How vulgarly patronising! Ernest groaned in spirit, and felt if he stayed here much longer he would have to be rude to his host; he really could not bear it, he felt. Why had his mother pressed him to come here? He was trying to think of something to say, and yet preserve his dignity, when Mr. Grainger said:

"Look here now, that's my daughter Maggie. This is young Venner."

Looking before him, Ernest beheld a vision of extreme beauty. There she stood smiling and bowing, a vision of white and pink, relieved by sparkling eyes and brilliant gems. Ernest became speechless. The man who could stand up before a whole congregation and speak with fluent tongue stood there now, dazed and dumb. At length he did stammer out something to the effect that it was a beautiful afternoon.

"Yes," observed Mr. Grainger, "it is; and now

you can go and talk to old Lamthorne. He is just over there. Go and introduce yourself; he is not very brilliant, so you needn't fear *him*."

With this remark, he extended his arm to Maggie, and led her across the lawn to introduce her to Sir Lionel Toneyworth, who had just arrived. As she went away, she looked back and gave Ernest a sweet smile, saying :

"I shall hope to see you again presently. I so much like your sister ; she often speaks of you."

Ernest could find no words in which to reply. As Mr. Grainger walked away, he said to Maggie :

"A most awkward young man ; a stupid pulpit thumper, without a blessed word to say for himself."

Maggie was silent. She had divined the true cause, and took it to be deeper homage to her beauty than that of the easy speech of soft flattery that had, of late, so often fallen on her ears.

Ernest watched the graceful creature as she walked away ; the proud man's advice and insolence were alike forgotten. He seemed to have eyes and thought only for her, and was still absently looking the way she had gone, when his sister came and touched him on the arm before he came back from dreamland.

"Well, what do you think of the boulder ? I wish he had not taken you off to Maggie. I wanted to have had the honour of *that* introduction. Don't you think her a topping sort of girl ?"

This queen of beauty, who had thus momentarily dazzled him with her splendour, to be called "a topping sort of girl" ! Well, it was a commonplace description, and called him back from his visionary

thoughts to the commonplace world around him. What was he, a poor preacher, to dare think of this heiress of a million? But his sister's description made him inwardly shudder; it seemed sheer desecration of this vision of grace and beauty.

"What do you think of him and of her?" said Kate.

"He is what I expected from your letters," said Ernest. He felt he could not speak of *her* just then with all this crowd standing by, so he ignored his sister's question, and said merely: "Introduce me to this Mr. Lamthorne, whom Mr. Grainger wishes me to speak to as one whose intellect will not overpower me."

"He is a dry old stick, but here is one still drier, though not so old, and I like him in spite of his crotchety ways. Mr. Nettleby, let me introduce my brother, Mr. Ernest Venner."

"Ah, I have heard of you!" returned Mr. Nettleby, extending his hand. "Someone told me you were more sound of heart than of doctrine."

Ernest laughed.

"I don't know about *that*," he said; "but sometimes the temptation to kick over the traces of dogma is very great."

"Well, well," observed Mr. Nettleby, "if you have got the heart, between you and me, we need not trouble much about the soundness of the doctrine. If the fountain-head is right, the stream that flows from it cannot be very far wrong. There are a great number of people here to-day. Do you recognise any of your own flock?"

"No," answered Ernest. "With few exceptions, my

flock, as you call it, is much too poor to come here. Nonconformity in this part of England means poverty, just as in the North it means wealth. The only people I know here are my sister and mother."

"Of course, you have been introduced to Mr. Grainger and Miss Sturge?"

"Yes. Is not the latter beautiful?" It came out involuntarily.

The grim lawyer smiled. "You are not the only one who has made that remark to me," he replied.

"No," said Ernest; "I don't suppose it was particularly original."

"Here is the very lady we were speaking of," returned Mr. Nettleby.

Ernest, turning round, beheld Maggie at his side, and she was saying: "Do have some refreshment, Mr. Venner. What can I offer you?"

"Yes, thank you—er, what may I get you?" stammered out Ernest.

"I should like an ice, and it is over there in the tent. Will you take me to it?" and she lightly placed her hand on his arm.

As they walked away, Mr. Nettleby smiled, and then chuckled audibly.

"Whatever are you laughing at all to yourself?" asked Kate, coming up.

"Another poor fellow done for," said Mr. Nettleby, pointing in the direction of the retreating figures with his stick.

"They are going for an ice, I suppose," observed Kate.

"Yes; I fancy so."

"Yet you don't ask me if I should like one," observed Kate demurely.

"Delighted, I am sure," answered Mr. Nettleby, offering her his arm, and feeling quite pleased as he led her to the tent. Age is seldom other than pleased to play the knight gallant to a young and pretty woman, even if it is only to look on at the fun.

But a critical observer might have used Mr. Nettleby's own words, and said, as he watched the widower of fifty-six escorting the girl of twenty-four: "Another poor fellow done for!"

As Ernest and Maggie walked to the tent, the latter said:

"Your sister tells me you are quite a famous preacher now at Norencester; that the chapel was almost empty when you first went there, and now it is full. I shall really have to come and hear you."

"I should be most pleased to see you," observed Ernest, at length finding speech; "but I fear you would be sadly disappointed if you expect to get what my mother—always proud of her son—calls a 'feast of intellect and a flow of soul.' It seems hard, uphill work sometimes, wearying drudgery, with very little intellect, and far less of soul. But the deacons are satisfied, as the seats are all let; but whether the letting of seats and the uplifting of humanity—saving of souls, they would call it—is one and the same thing, is another matter."

He spoke very earnestly, very seriously, and with no embarrassment now, for his thoughts were of his work, not of the beautiful woman at his side. But he was soon brought back from the high ideal of his

work to the trivialities of the little things around him by Maggie giving him a gentle hint that they had come hither for an ice. He got one from the table and handed it her somewhat awkwardly, and then stood watching her, without a word to say for himself. He had ceased to be for the moment the enthusiastic uplifter of humanity, and was only an ordinary lover, abashed by the grace and beauty of the woman who *stood* before him!

"Would you mind getting me a chair?" asked Maggie.

"How rude of me," he answered, as he hurried after one.

"One?" said Maggie, when he returned. "Wouldn't you like to sit down too, and won't you have an ice as well?"

So Ernest went for another chair, and then another ice, and finally sat down by Maggie's side.

"You will not scold me too much if I come to chapel, Mr. Venner, will you?" asked Maggie, laughing. "I am sure you could be very severe on gaiety and worldliness if you chose—at least, Kate says so."

"Does she?" he asked. "I think *she* needs it sometimes."

"Well," said Maggie, looking slyly from the top of her dainty fan, "I shall come and take you by surprise one of these days, just to hear how you can scold in the pulpit."

While this conversation was taking place, Mrs. Venner was talking to Mr. Grainger. She had made up her mind that when visiting The Mansion she would combine business with pleasure. The organ

at Zion Chapel needed repair, and a fund was being raised to defray the expense. So she determined to take the most favourable opportunity of speaking to Mr. Grainger about it and ask him for a donation. Mrs. Venner told Kate of her intention, and asked her to let her know if she saw any opportunity for her to do so. It did not occur until just before they were leaving, when Kate said :

"Look, mother, 'Capital, which is Me' is giving his tongue a rest. He is actually not talking to anyone, but standing there alone. Now is your chance."

Mrs. Venner went up to him.

"A beautiful place you have here, Mr. Grainger; the grounds are magnificent."

"Yes, marm, so is the house. We don't put it all on the outside here, you know."

"I can quite believe you from what my daughter says. She is most comfortable here."

"Well, she would be a silly if she wasn't," said Mr. Grainger.

Mrs. Venner hoped to be able to lead up to her subject in some way or another, but it seemed impossible; the man's answers were so very blunt. There was nothing to be done but to at once speak of the matter whilst she had the chance. Any moment he might turn his back on her and walk away. But to her surprise, the subject was led up to by Mr. Grainger himself, who said :

"Your son seems very quiet, marm. If he has no more gag in the pulpit than he has here; well, he won't tire his congregation out, that's very certain."

"My son is a most eloquent preacher," said Mrs. Venner, with a touch of dignity and pride. "By the

way, speaking of my son reminds me I want to speak to you about a matter connected with our chapel."

"Is it a debt?" asked Mr. Grainger. "Never heard of a chapel that hadn't one yet."

"Well, I am sorry to say it has a little debt."

"Very bad; look what an example to set to the community at large. Now, I have never owed a penny in my life."

"Much to your credit," said Mrs. Venner. "But I was going to say our organ needs repair."

"Organs always do," said Mr. Grainger; "specially chapel ones."

"Could you help us with a donation towards repairing it? Of course, we shall publish a list in the *Norencester Mercury* of all the donors—and I thought perhaps you would like to—"

"Top the lot with fifty quid? Well, I will think about it. Perhaps one of these times we will come and hear your son hold forth. I am not one of your bigoted sort. I go and give old Lamthorne a turn, why shouldn't I your son? Capital is never bigoted. I have been a successful man, and why shouldn't I thank the Lord for it as well in chapel as at church? But," continued Mr. Grainger, "whenever I have been to chapel—it isn't often—I have heard a little too much of the Lazarus business. Now, I have never heard that Dives picked pockets, or committed burglary, or forged bank-notes, or got into debt and ended his days in the workhouse. Dives is never lazy, and doesn't have to come, as you have to come, I might say, for the patronage of Success."

"I don't come to beg for myself," answered Mrs. Venner, with an air of offended dignity.

"Well, marm, for your son's organ—much the same thing—it's all in the family. By-the-by," continued Mr. Grainger, "here comes Lamthorne. I must introduce you to him. Church and Chapel ought to know each other. Mr. Lamthorne, this is Mrs. Venner; her son is the other black crow of the party over yonder there. He is a Dissenter, so his sister tells me, and a staunch advocate for disestablishment of the Church. What say you to that?"

Kate had not said this, but Mr. Grainger saw here a chance of giving "Old Lamthorne" a rub.

"It will be a national calamity when it comes—if it ever does come," quietly added Mr. Lamthorne. "But need we discuss a bone of contention now? There must be other subjects upon which Mrs. Venner and I can agree."

"I'll tell you what to do," said Mr. Grainger. "The Church ought to do with chapels as I do with rival shops, tolerate no opposition."

"I don't understand you," said Mr. Lamthorne meekly.

"Listen!" said Mr. Grainger. "If a shopkeeper sets up against me in a town, I lower my prices immediately. I chuck the stuff away, so to speak, for a month or so. If I drop a thousand, what do I care? I soon close the man up; then, if he has got any grit in him, and he generally *has*, to set up in opposition against me, I reopen that shop in my name, and make that man my manager—my servant. That is what the Church should do; it's got plenty of money. It should make all seats free, engage the best professional singers, the best preacher (though

the shorter the sermons the better). Let the Church do this for a year, and where will the chapels be? Closed up. Bankrupt, so to speak. That would soon stop the cry of: 'Disestablish the Church.' 'Down with the Church!'"

"I don't think we want to close up the chapels," said Mr. Lamthorne meekly.

"That's what you would do if you had a smart business man at your head." And Mr. Grainger added inwardly, "Like me."

As Mrs. Venner left that day, she said to her son :

"What a dreadfully coarse, rude man Mr. Grainger is, and he is coming to hear you some day, so Kate says. Of course, if we could interest him in the church his wealth would be of much service to us. Kate says he never gives less than a five-pound cheque each Sunday. But we should have to flatter him and feed his vanity to repletion."

"That would be impossible," said Ernest. "The appetite that feeds on praise is never satisfied."

CHAPTER XXII

CROSS ROADS

WHEN Ernest returned home that afternoon, he was sensible of two things he had not felt when he started out somewhat reluctantly with his mother, earlier in the day.

First, he was in love, deeply in love, with Maggie. Secondly, he was aware of the utter folly of it. What would the worldly Mr. Grainger say to him, a poor minister, with a mother and sister to keep on an income of two hundred a year? What, too, would everyone think? What could they think, but that he was a mere fortune-hunter!

He felt he must at once stamp out the image of Maggie from his heart; but that was easier said than done. The image evidently had a strong aversion to being stamped out; indeed, the more he tried to efface it, the more vivid it became. In his walks, his studies, his duties, Maggie's sweet face was always before him.

He had quite made up his mind he would never go to The Mansion again, and as it was more than possible Maggie would forget all about her promised visit to the chapel to hear him "scold," it was most likely he would never see her again—at least, for a very long while.

He should certainly do all he could to avoid her. If he knew she was coming to his house with Kate, he should go out, and thus he hoped, or he tried to persuade himself that he did, that in time the memory would grow fainter, and the image, now imprinted there, would fade away.

He was about to take his summer holiday, and perhaps that would help him to forget his visit to The Mansion. He was to join an old college friend, and they were to go touring in Scotland.

While there, he met a gentleman holding office at one of the largest and most influential chapels in Scotland. Its pulpit was then being filled with supplies, for the pastor was just dead.

Through the influence of this gentleman, Ernest was invited to preach there on two Sundays during his holiday, and he found the large honorarium given a most welcome addition to his slender purse! It was considered an honour to preach in Union Chapel, for its two late pastors had been men of marked distinction.

It had been the chapel, too, which he had attended as a boy, and his father had once said: "Ah, Ernest, if when you grow up and become a preacher you were to occupy that pulpit, eh, lad, shouldn't I be proud of you," and his mother had answered: "He's a clever lad, and there is no knowing what he might not do if he tried."

Ernest was feeling somewhat fagged out when he left Norencester; he returned to it fresh and buoyant, but the image was still undimmed in his memory. Nevertheless, he felt he must work on, and adhere to his resolution never to see her. While thus bravely

trying to stamp out the image, he was confronted with the reality.

One Sunday morning, as he ascended the pulpit, he beheld in the body of the chapel Maggie, Kate, and Mr. Grainger. He was certainly confused when he remembered what subject he had chosen for his morning's discourse. On his holiday someone had lent him a copy of Ruskin's "Sesame and Lilies," and he had read with keen interest an essay showing that most of the parables of Christ had to do with the good and bad uses of money. It had given him an idea for a sermon, one which was really a protest against the accumulation of great wealth. His first thought was to change it when he saw Maggie and Mr. Grainger. But that was difficult; he had nothing else just then at his command. He was not a good extempore preacher, and could do little without notes. And then he thought: "Why should he change it? If any man needed preaching at, it was surely Mr. Grainger. But there was Maggie; what would she think?" But even then he thought, his first duty was to Christ, so he decided he would stand up manfully and speak the words he had chosen. He had selected as his first lesson the parable of the widow's mite, and he took for his text the verses descriptive of the rich man's coming to Christ, and asking what should he do to be saved.

When he commenced his sermon he seemed, so his mother thought, unusually nervous. It was the presence of Maggie that caused it, but it did not last long. He soon forgot even her; indeed, forgot all except his message and his Master. Once fairly

launched on his subject, he seemed less to need his notes, and he seldom referred to them.

As Mr. Grainger sat and listened, he thought: "It's all very well for these poor parsons to talk against capital. That's because they haven't got any. Let him wait until he gets a few thousand in some safe four per cent. ; he won't sing the praise of poverty then ; he will talk more about the virtue of prudence."

Maggie thought what a clever preacher he was, and at first listened with mingled curiosity and admiration. But presently the orator stirred something within her better than either of these ; he touched her heart.

"We are all travellers," said the preacher, "coming from we know not where, and going we know not whither, and in our brief stay among the transient shadows of this world, let us not clutch at them, and deem them realities. Wealth, fame, pleasure" (here he thought of Maggie), "loved and sought, and deemed so real, what are they but mere illusions? ('I don't think he would call my pile a mere illusion if he had it,' thought Mr. Grainger.) "When we renew our journey," continued the orator, "we cannot take them with us, any more than we can grasp within our hands the mist of this autumn morning. They are but of such stuff as dreams are made of, and, like the mist, will vanish, and leave not a wrack behind. Only one reality is there that the traveller in his brief halt in this little world can take with him. Day by day, whether for good or bad, is shaped and moulded the only thing in life we can take into

eternity—our character. Let us, then, try and fashion ours in the image of Christ!"

Maggie listened almost breathless as this torrent of eloquence continued. As she looked in the direction of the pulpit, she saw there a hot, white face, with deep-set, earnest eyes, that seemed to look beyond all the transient things of this world, and behold only the great ideal, Christ. It made her think for many days afterwards whether pleasure and gaiety were, after all, the sum total of life. It made her think, too, with a touch of shame and pain, of a cottage in Burstone, of late almost absent from her thoughts.

Even the worldly Mr. Grainger at length felt himself compelled to listen to the impassioned orator, and he shifted uneasily in his seat, pausing to think whether, after all, his life had been quite such a success as he had considered it. He wondered, too, how he had dared to patronise this young preacher as he did. He had deemed him a poor, brainless, inert being, and lo! he beheld a man of true dignity, of burning zeal, pleading with eloquent tongue and eye flashing with such fire, that for the moment it awed him and made him feel uneasy. Was this the nervous, hesitating parson who could scarcely utter a few words of commonplace civility to his daughter? Mr. Grainger felt he could not dare so to patronise him again; and he felt something else, and that was he had better not come to that chapel any more. He would "stick to Church," he told Maggie. It was, after all, the proper thing to do. He relieved his feelings somewhat by dropping into the plate a cheque for five pounds payable to "Ernest Venner,"

and for once almost wished he had prefixed a "Mr." to the name.

He hurried out of the chapel the moment the benediction was pronounced, followed by Maggie and Kate, and the Grainger carriage rolled away from Zion Chapel, never again to return.

At dinner that day Mrs. Venner inquired :

"What did Mr. Grainger put in the plate? I saw it was paper."

"Five pounds," replied Ernest.

"That is the sort we want at the chapel," said his mother. "What we want is quality—we have got quantity. I do wish we could leaven it up a little; I should not be surprised if he was to join our Church." She always spoke of it as "Church," it sounded so much less plebeian than "Chapel." "It is a pity," she continued, "that you had chosen that subject for his first visit. Of course, I agree with all you said, but I think, for the interest of the Church, it would have been better to have modified it somewhat. First catch your sinner, make him give a good donation, and then thrash him—not before."

"I am afraid I am, and always shall be, lacking in diplomacy, mother. But *should* a preacher be a diplomatist? I think not."

"At times he should be one," returned Mrs. Venner. "The cause should be studied."

But the visit had not helped Ernest to blot out Maggie from his memory. It showed him that she had not forgotten her promise. "What had she thought of his sermon?" he wondered. She came half expecting a scolding, from what she said, and

she certainly got one. He wished he had been more severe, and that she would never come again; and yet the next Sunday he looked round the chapel, and was disappointed not to see her there.

"My scolding was too severe," he thought, when he looked round in vain among the sea of upturned faces for the one sweet face. "She will never come again."

But he was soon not only to see her, but speak to her.

He was taking a long walk in the country, and was a few miles from home, when he heard behind him the sound of an approaching carriage. He just kept to one side of the road to allow the vehicle to pass. To his surprise, as it neared him it slackened its speed, and then stopped at his side, whilst a voice said:

"Good morning, Mr. Venner! I am going your way. Can I give you a lift?"

What could he do? To refuse would be rude; to accept would certainly not be obliterating her from his memory. But such rudeness was out of the question, so with feelings of mingled pleasure and reluctance, he jumped into the carriage.

"I had no idea," said Maggie, "that you knew my Doctor John. How did you come to know him?"

"I have known him some years now. I first met him one day when I was out walking."

"Deep in thought as you were just now?" observed Maggie. "What were you thinking of? I suppose next Sunday's sermon. Well, I have just come from Burstone. I have been to see Doctor John. I found him at home, for a wonder, and I told him how I liked your sister, and that I had been to hear you;

and you know he likes you very much, and he says sometimes he goes to hear you preach because you never preach at him."

"Like I did at you, you mean?" answered Ernest, with a grim remembrance of the unfortunate sermon.

"Oh, I did not mind it a bit," answered Maggie. "No, I didn't mean that—I mean—I mean—I did mind it a great deal, and I think it did me good; a pill, even if bitter, is good to take now and again."

"I did not wish to hurt your feelings," said Ernest tenderly.

"Oh, I am sure you didn't," answered Maggie, and then there ensued a long pause.

"Shall I drive you home?" asked Maggie, after a while. "It won't be far out of my way. Do let me."

"No," answered Ernest; "put me down at the cross roads. You will go to the right, and I to the left. Our roads, like our ways in life, divide."

"I wish our ways in life were not quite so divergent," answered Maggie softly.

"Why?" asked Ernest eagerly.

"Need you ask?" said Maggie; and she averted her eyes, and a deeper colour came to her face.

Ernest made no answer. It was a moment of great temptation, but he did not yield to it. He exerted all his will-power, and stamped on the image, that time almost fiercely.

"I don't understand you," he said.

Maggie felt she had gone too far. She was hurt, too, at his answer. His voice was so cold compared with what it was a moment ago.

"I mean," she said, "our ways in life are divergent. Yours is one of work, mine is one of pleasure!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Ernest, in a tone of unmistakable disappointment. He seemed never satisfied; he had crushed the image, and now almost began to wish he had not done so.

Before he could say more, the cross roads were reached, and Maggie, holding out a hand, pointed with the other, saying:

"That way duty, and this pleasure."

Ere the carriage moved away, Ernest leaned over, and said softly into her ear:

"Must the roads, then, be ever divergent?"

But Maggie made no reply. She only smiled, and waved her hand.

CHAPTER XXIII

TEMPTATION

THE young minister returned home with mingled feelings of pain and pleasure. It was very pleasant to think what marked encouragement Maggie had given him, and yet the next moment it was one of pain, for he was aware of the entire hopelessness of his love. It might be many years before his income would reach five hundred pounds—the very lowest on which he could dare think of offering marriage to a girl like Maggie, and even that small sum seemed absurd in comparison with her present station. It would scarce clothe her as she was now being clothed, and as for accepting help from Mr. Grainger to keep up a home in better style, even if that were offered, his pride rose in rebellion at the very thought of it. No ; there was nothing left but to go on stamping out the image, and this was becoming week by week a harder thing to do.

When he was, at least, earning five hundred or more a year, then, and then only, would he dare hope. In the meantime, Maggie would be surrounded by many suitors, and daily flattered and courted.

On entering the house, Ernest found, to his surprise, that his sister Kate was there, sitting in the front room with his mother and Lilian.

"Well, how is his reverence?" asked Kate. "I say, didn't you warm the old boulder up that Sunday! I never saw him look so miserable before. I think you fairly knocked the stuffing out of him then. He's done with chapel. You won't get the Grainger turn-out rolling up to your shrine again in a hurry."

"I've just been riding in the 'Grainger turn-out,' as you call it," said Ernest, with a smile.

"How, when, and where?" asked Kate, astonished.

"Oh, do tell us all about it," cried Lilian, clapping her hands. "It's as good as a fairy-tale."

"Maggie would do well for the beautiful princess," observed Kate roguishly.

"And I am sure," put in Mrs. Venner, "Ernest would make a very handsome prince."

"Mother!" exclaimed her son, in tones of expostulation.

"I say, did you kiss the princess?" asked the younger sister.

"Lilian, you must not be rude," said Mrs. Venner. "If you will leave off your chatter," she continued, "Ernest will tell us all about it. We are taking it for granted that Miss Sturge was in the carriage; perhaps she was not."

"Oh, yes, she was," put in Kate. "I saw her start off in it for Burstone, and she told me I could have my fling for the day if I liked, and here I am; but why don't you tell us all about it, Ernest?"

"I don't think," answered Ernest, with a smile, "you ladies have given me much of a chance."

"We will be stil las mice," said Lilian; "as still as the chapel folk are when listening to your best

oratory, and it's good, though it's your sister that says it."

"He is wonderfully improving as an orator," observed Mrs. Venner. "Ah! if only my poor husband could but hear him."

"Perhaps he does, mother," said Ernest quietly. "But you want me to tell you all about Miss Sturge. Well, there is nothing much to tell. I was out near Thackham Woods, when I was overtaken by Mr. Grainger's carriage. Well, Miss Sturge stopped the carriage, asked me to enter it, as she wanted to talk to me about Doctor John. She did talk to me about Doctor John, and—well, there, that is all there is to tell."

"How disappointing!" exclaimed Lilian.

"I say, Ernest, the talk wasn't *all* about Doctor John, was it?" asked Kate.

"Why, he is blushing," said Lilian. "I am sure it wasn't. He won't tell us anything nice; brothers never do."

"Well," said Ernest, rising, "I will go and do a little reading. I won't do much studying to-day in honour of your being here, Kate."

"Oh, by-the-by, Ernest," exclaimed Mrs. Venner, "there is a letter for you on the study table—I had forgotten all about it."

As Ernest entered his dingy little study in the back of the house—a study that gave him a view of some very small back gardens, generally filled, more or less, with lines of washing, which gave him close insight into the under-garments of all his neighbours, whether he wished it or not—he found the letter on the table, and picking it up, opened it, curious as

to whom it could be from. The writing was unknown to him. As he read it, his heart beat faster and his brain reeled with excitement. It seemed impossible, too good to be a reality ; he felt he must be in a dream. The letter offered him the pastorate of Union Chapel, where he had preached on his holiday, with a salary of a thousand a year. What need now to stamp out the image? He would accept the offer at once, and go and propose to Maggie to-morrow. Such was his first thought in his delirium of joyous excitement. The second thought was Duty. The letter dropped from his hand. In a moment, he saw how impossible it was for him to accept it. He had not been at his present church a year yet. It had waited for him six months, and it had given him fifty pounds a year more than his predecessor. He was filling the chapel, and he hoped he was doing good. He picked up the letter with a sigh of regret, and took it downstairs to his mother, whom he found sitting alone. The two girls had gone for a walk together.

"This letter, mother, will interest you," said Ernest, as he handed it to her.

His mother felt for her spectacles, and commenced to read.

"Ah, Ernest," she exclaimed, "I always felt you would climb to the top. I always told my poor husband so." Then, rising from her seat, she kissed her son, and then resumed the letter. "And a thousand a year," she said. "It seems too good to be true. I am proud of you. How good God is."

"He is always good, mother ; perhaps most often when we don't think so,"

"True," answered his mother, "but we can see and feel the goodness sometimes, and I feel it now. When shall you leave here? How long notice must you give them?"

"I am not sure I shall leave here at all," answered Ernest simply.

His mother looked at him, but not with surprise, for she failed to grasp his meaning.

"Not leave here! You must leave here. You can't reside here and preach there. It's much too far away. Besides, you are *somebody* in the Church now, and you must live in a larger house, and keep a carriage, though, of course, you won't use it on Sundays, as some of the ungodly ministers in other parts do."

"Mother, mother!" replied Ernest, with a touch of impatience. "Can't you see the other side of the question? Is the object of my life to be only that of getting the loaves and fishes?"

"Nay, Ernest," said Mrs. Venner proudly; "it's saving souls."

"I have been trying to save souls here. It's an uphill fight, but with God's help, I will still go on."

"That you will; and think of what a large sphere of duty God has now called you to, and think of it, too—a thousand a year."

"I am not going, mother," answered Ernest.

Mrs. Venner rose from her seat, exclaiming, with uplifted hands:

"Why, it would be wicked, when God calls you, not to obey His summons."

"But does God call me? That is the question, mother."

"Why, of course He does," answered his mother, with a smile, and a look upon her face that seemed to settle everything. "You don't suppose the devil wrote the letter, do you?"

"I am not so sure of it," answered Ernest simply.

Mrs. Venner looked shocked.

"If anyone else had made that remark," she said, "I should have thought it profane. I cannot think what is coming to you, Ernest. You ought to be glad with joy, as I am."

"I spoke figuratively; it was the only answer your question permitted."

"I can't agree with you. You've got the most extraordinary ideas now, and even hesitate, as I said before, when God calls."

"If I really felt it was God's call, there would be little hesitancy in me. It was once the dream of my life."

"Which God is now going to make a reality," added his mother quietly.

"I am not going, mother. It would not be right. I am doing some good here."

"Not much. They are proud, ignorant, and stubborn."

"Then all the more do they need a teacher."

"They can have one. God has plenty of labourers in His vineyard to fill your place," returned Mrs. Venner.

"In truth He has, I am thankful to say," replied Ernest.

"But not many," said his mother proudly, "who could fill Union pulpit."

"Yes, mother ; there are others quite as able and more worthy than I, but that is not my reason."

"Then why disregard God's call? He does not always speak so plainly, or send to all a summons like that. Beware, my son, how you disregard it. Be not like Jonah of old, unwilling to obey the Lord's command. He bids you preach against this city of Nineveh ; flee not to Tarshish. You cannot get away from God any more than Jonah. There are shipwrecks now in our lives, and you may be flung overboard, and be three days—figuratively speaking, as you said a few minutes ago—and three nights in the belly of the whale."

Ernest rose from his seat and paced the room.

"Mother," he said, "we cannot settle questions of the present day by illustrations from Scripture, or by merely quoting texts. That city is not Nineveh, nor am I Jonah."

"He was a prophet of the Lord, like yourself," said his mother.

Ernest smiled at this description of himself. He did not reply to it, but added :

"Nor do I intend fleeing to Tarshish. I shall stay here in Norencester. As to this letter, I shall think over it for a few days, and ask for guidance ; but if I feel then as I do now—and I cannot see how I shall ever think otherwise—my answer will be a very firm refusal."

"I think you are wrong thus to fly in the face of the Lord," said Mrs. Venner.

"I have done some little good here. I hope I may do more, but were I to accept this invitation, it would undo all the good I have done. Of what

avail would it be for me to have preached, 'Sell all thou hast, and give to the poor,' if, with eager, outstretched hands, I grasp the first filthy gold the devil would thrust into them?"

"Poor, misguided lad!" exclaimed Mrs. Venner. "With blind eyes you will not see the mercy of the Lord. Nor will you see what it is He wills you to do. Here, there are only five hundred souls at the most to save, even with chairs down the aisle, or sitting on the steps of the pulpit. There, you might save two thousand souls with a sitting each."

Ernest smiled at her description, and said:

"Well, mother, I am sorry to disappoint you, but Duty points, and I must follow it."

"Then," said Mrs. Venner, "the Lord and Duty point diverse ways."

"Never!" said Ernest firmly.

"There is another duty you forget," continued Mrs. Venner. "There is your duty first to God, then to man, then to yourself."

"I am in no danger of forgetting that. We seldom are," said Ernest.

"But you do sometimes; you do now. You forget. Is there not one you love? Ah! I have guessed your secret. If you could win her heart, could you wish her to live in this humble way on your small pittance? My Lady Disdain rolls along in her carriage. Would she share this humble roof, and be content with one maid-of-all-work?"

"She would if she loved me, mother."

"Yes; but would you ask her to be your wife, placed as you are now placed? Ask yourself that plain question, and what does your pride say?"

"Mother, it is hard, do not make it harder. May God help me to do what is right," he answered slowly and sadly, as he walked out of the room.

In after years he remembered those three days in which he left the letter unanswered. They were days of great temptation to him. Duty and Self were continually at battle. Here was his life of hard toil, with little hope of better remuneration, for his Church was poor, and gave him all it could afford—indeed, at times he felt it was more. While he remained here on that stipend, he must never dream of offering love to Maggie. Let him but write "Yes" to the letter, he would increase his earnings fourfold, gain popular fame, and then, greatest temptation of all, he could ask and perhaps win Maggie. As he thought of her beautiful face, how hard and bitter seemed Fate. And after all, said Self, he would be only acting with prudence; he had his way to make in the world, and why not make it. Such an opportunity might not occur twice in a lifetime. During those three days he could not rest at home, he could not study, or even write, and wandered about the streets aimlessly. But with it all, he never wavered.

On the third day he wrote the letter, and shattered for ever the image imprinted on his heart.

The day after the letter of refusal was sent by Ernest, Mrs. Venner said to her son:

"But you will take some steps to make known to the church what a great act of self-denial you have practised."

"I shall do nothing of the kind, mother. It would be most repugnant to my feelings."

"But you should. The church would then

appreciate you at your true worth, and it might make an effort to increase your salary."

"I do not wish for it. My people are but poor, they give me all they can afford, and I value it as Christ valued the widow's mite."

"Ah, Ernest, you have missed a grand opportunity. You should have taken a lesson from your cousin, Allen Merton."

"Well, what did he do?" asked Ernest.

"He was receiving for his services to the Lord at Birmingham three hundred a year," said Mrs. Venner. "Now, he was a very able and eloquent man, and it was not surprising that he soon received another offer to do the Lord's work at five hundred a year. Well, he had not been long in his present pastorate, which, by-the-by, was his third."

"But I don't see what this has to do with me, mother," broke in Ernest impatiently.

"Listen! He called a meeting of his deacons, and showed them the letter. They did not want to lose him, as he filled the church, so they whispered to him unofficially that a rise of a hundred a year would ensue if he stayed. He kept the church waiting a whole fortnight in suspense before he told them his decision. It was a grand scene when he made it known on the Sunday morning after his sermon. He knew how to educate a church into valuing its minister. You don't, my lad."

"I have no wish," said Ernest impatiently.

"Well," continued Mrs. Venner, "the church was crowded; then, in almost breathless silence, he read his letter of refusal. He felt he could not tear himself away from his dear people who had rooted

themselves deep into his heart. That is how a minister should talk to his church. Some of the women wept tears of joy, and some of the men clapped, and then Mark Turner struck a chord on the organ, and we all stood up and sang, 'Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.' Ah! I said to myself, one day I will see my Ernest honoured like that."

"God forbid," said Ernest fervently, "any such desecration of His House! It should be the temple of all humility, and its minister should be the most humble of all. I fear such adulation would hardly tend to make him so."

"Well," continued Mrs. Venner, "you need not have the clapping. Your cousin certainly did disapprove of that; but he had what you have not, a sense of the grandeur of being one of God's prophets."

"I would rather have the humility of Christ," was the answer.

"Well, you could have this too; but I do think you ought to say something in the morning's service—even if only a little."

"No, mother, thank you, I would rather not."

But he did refer to it in a guarded way, though he had no intention whatever of doing so when he ascended the pulpit. It was not unnatural that the event of this momentous week should have its effect on the sermon of the following Sunday. The Sabbath discourse was often a reflex of the preacher's mind; so often joyous and thankful, and but seldom sad. This week he seemed to play on a new chord, in a beautiful, soft minor key, and the dominant note was Resignation. Having ascended the pulpit, he

saw, to his great surprise, Maggie not more than a dozen pews away from him. But there was no Mr. Grainger with her. He had rolled off in his carriage to hear Mr. Brown, who, it will be remembered, "knocked through the church service ten minutes quicker than anyone else." Maggie had come accompanied only by Kate, and they had travelled partly by road and partly by train. In a sense, he was sorry to see Maggie there. It only reopened an old wound in his heart, and made the course he had taken in the past week seem harder than ever. But as he looked at her during the singing of the hymns, it occurred to him that he would make known to her, in a most unmistakable way, the decision he had arrived at, to banish her from his heart and follow the hard part of Duty.

He preached a quiet, thoughtful sermon. It was not marked by any high flights of oratory, nor any attempt at it. There were no fierce denunciations, such as had made Mr. Grainger uncomfortable in his seat; there was no passionate supplication, such as so often stirred the heart of Doctor John, who now and again slipped into a pew near the door. It was but a simple, earnest reflection on duty.

"Of the three words," said the preacher, "written on the scroll of life, and which have ever been the inspiring trumpet-call of men—God, Immortality, Duty—I would ask you to think that while the first is to all inconceivable, and the second to some unbelievable—though, I trust, to none here—the last is clear to all.¹ He who looks for it, no matter what his

¹ These words, slightly varied, were spoken by George Eliot in the course of conversation with a friend.

belief or non-belief, whether he be a cultured priest or an ignorant savage, will see the hand of conscience pointing clearly to hard, stern duty ; and whilst there is much in life shadowy and mystical, this is never so. It is real, absolute, and must be sought and followed at all cost. Do not think I would point to you the rough and thorny way to heaven, and like a reckless libertine, the rosy path of dalliance tread "—and here Ernest looked at Maggie—"I, too, have had to give up bright hopes in my life, and walk the hard path of duty. Some of you, I am sure, have done the same."

That was all in his sermon that had any personal reference to himself or Maggie, but it was enough for her to understand very clearly to what he referred. That she *did* understand it, he felt quite sure, because she never came again to Zion Chapel.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE WILL

REUBEN STARKHAM laid down his pen and read the last sentence over again :

"The culture of flowers is the pleasure of all, from the monarch on the throne to the humblest cottager of this village."

"I think that will do for him fine," he thought. "I could not beat that if I tried all day."

The "him" referred to was Thomas Grainger, Esquire, of The Mansion, who was to distribute the prizes at the local Horticultural Show. Mr. Grainger was to make a short speech in praise of the culture of flowers, and especially of his own great interest in them. Mr. Grainger knew nothing about flowers whatever, and his interest in them was limited to periodical grumblings at his gardener because of the large bills for seeds and bulbs, and to wearing one of the rarest exotics in his button-hole, generally an orchid. It was not because of its beauty or rarity, but because it indicated wealth, and proclaimed the social status of the man.

"When you see a geranium," he had once remarked, "or a fuschia, or a *glory dejon* (it was thus he pronounced it) stuck in his button-hole, you may put that man down at two hundred and fifty pounds a year at

the outside ; while mignonette means a pound a week and a cottage. Wouldn't have such rubbish as either of them."

Accordingly, such rubbish found no place in the great Mr. Grainger's button-hole ; but it had to in a speech he was about to make, so he said to his secretary : " I want just notes enough for me to jaw for ten minutes, about all kinds of flowers. Mind and lug in something smart and comic, and finish up grand, like the vicar does, only cut him out clean."

Reuben Starkham had managed to jot down enough notes to enable Mr. Grainger to bore his audience for ten minutes, and he had, he thought, " finished up grand," but he had not introduced anything comic about flowers. As he sat thinking what he could say, the bell rang in Mr. Grainger's office.

It will be as well to acquaint the reader with what was happening there, and the cause of the bell being rung.

Mr. Grainger and his solicitor, Mr. Nettleby, were seated in the private office of the former, and Mr. Grainger had just said : " Everything absolutely to her."

" No legacies to servants ? " inquired Mr. Nettleby. " Not your old housekeeper Jael, a faithful retainer ? She must have been in your service fifteen years now."

" And had plenty of time to feather her nest. She has had a good picking, I will be bound ; and if not, then more fool she. Do you think I have spent my time checking the washing bills, or watching how much sugar they use a week ? "

" No legacies, then, to anyone ? "

"No. You have had your picking already, Nettleby—so there is nothing even to you."

"I was not meaning myself," answered Mr. Nettleby stiffly. "But are there none among your own friends or servants, business or private, some who have served you well, and whom you would like to remember?"

"Now, Nettleby, this is a matter of business," answered Mr. Grainger, in tones of annoyance. "Will you take my instructions, or must I go elsewhere? I think I made myself understood?"

"Pray proceed," returned Mr. Nettleby. "I regret I interrupted you with a suggestion."

"It is not for a lawyer to suggest," returned Mr. Grainger; "it is for a lawyer to carry out his instructions. I think, Nettleby, we understand one another."

"Perfectly," answered Mr. Nettleby. "I await your instructions."

"My instructions are: All to her. Sole executor, yourself. The name you know, Maggie Sturge. Now, here is a point I want to make clear to you. Her real name is Margaret, not Maggie; at least, I think so."

"Then we will say Margaret Sturge," said Mr. Nettleby, "commonly known as Maggie Sturge," and he wrote the sentence on a sheet of paper in front of him.

"Present address," said Mr. Grainger, "The Mansion, Rushmere, late of Burstone."

"Yes," continued Mr. Nettleby, writing that down; "what county is Burstone in? It seems just on the border of Broadshire, but I am not sure."

"I don't know," replied Mr. Grainger irritably. "Is it necessary?"

"Well, it is usual," returned Mr. Nettleby, "to be as explicit as one can; and in this case, where there are two names to the—"

"Well, well," said Mr. Grainger, ringing the bell in front of him. "It's another word, of course, or five—'In the county of blank'; and it is so much a folio, isn't it, eh, Nettleby?" and he burst into a coarse laugh.

"What county is Burstone in?" asked Mr. Grainger of Reuben, as he entered the room. As the door opened, Mr. Nettleby took up a piece of blotting-paper and laid it over the sheet of notes. But the edge of the white paper protruded a little way under the pink blotter, and Reuben's lynx eyes noticed it.

"Really, I am not sure, sir, where the county border is. I will refer and see," and with that remark he quitted the room. As he did so, Mr. Nettleby removed the blotting-paper, took up his sheet of notes, and glanced over them. In a few minutes the door was opened by Reuben again. Mr. Nettleby laid his note-paper on the table with the writing downwards, as the ink was now dry.

"It is in Broadshire, sir. Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"No," replied Mr. Grainger. "But," he added, just as the man was going out of the room, "just open that window. It's beastly close. Leave the door open a minute. Give us a breath of air."

Reuben did as he was told, but no sooner was the window open, than a puff of wind blew the lawyer's

notes to Reuben's feet, and with the writing uppermost. He picked the sheet from the ground, and handed it to Mr. Nettleby, but as he did so, his eyes caught these words: "Margaret Sturge, commonly known as Maggie Sturge."

"Shut the door, quick; it's upsetting all my papers too; beastly draught this," said Mr. Grainger.

Reuben quickly closed the door after him, and as he seated himself at his desk, he took a sheet of paper and wrote on it: "Margaret Sturge, commonly known as Maggie Sturge, late of Burstone."

"That may be useful," he thought to himself, so having blotted it, he folded it carefully and placed it in an inner pocket. "Mother," he said to himself, "won't this help us to tread the stony path?" The "stony path" was an expression of his mother's. Through life this had been her motto, which she instilled into her son's ear: "Never be afraid of roughing it; always tread the stony path, and then you must get on."

When Reuben reached home that day, he drew from his pocket the little piece of paper he had written on and showed it to his mother.

"What do you think of that?" he asked.

"I don't quite know what it means, Reuben dear," she said, reading it.

"Nor do I, mother, but it's the key to a secret, and keys and secrets are always handy things to possess. I had no idea when I was talking to Maggie the other day—"

"Who is this Maggie?" asked Mrs. Starkham. "You have never said much about her."

"I saw no chance then, mother, now I do. Maggie

is Mr. Grainger's adopted daughter. I have seen her several times. She is very pretty and very nice, and she is coming in for all the money, and I have got an idea that she is an illegitimate child of old Grainger's."

"How do you know she is coming in for his money, Reuben? Do be careful. Don't go off the stony path."

"It's all right, mother. She will get it. I just put my ear to the keyhole when they were talking, and I heard old Nettleby say: 'I will have the will ready for signature to-morrow morning, and I will bring it round. He will want two witnesses, not legatees, I expect. I shall be called in to be one. I can sign my name without looking at what I write. I have been practising it this morning. So I shall write very slowly, and just see what I can.'"

"But Mr. Grainger may have left you something, and you won't have to sign."

"Not he, mother—not even the penny out of which he built up his fortune," he added satirically.

After business that day, Reuben walked to Burstone to make inquiries. He decided that the best place to commence would be at the village inn, so he sought out the Red Lion, ordered a glass of ale, and commenced to cross-examine the landlord.

"By the way," he said, "I am in search of a young lady named Maggie Sturge. Do you know the name?"

"I know the name of Maggie, and I know the name of Sturge," said the landlord. "She used to live with old Sturge who's now in the churchyard."

"A young girl of about twenty," said Reuben,

"with brown eyes, rather pretty, of medium height—has curls all over her face?"

"That's the one," remarked the landlord. "When she was a child—why, it don't seem but yesterday—she used to run about here, with her short, curly hair cut close to the head."

"Did you know her mother?" inquired Reuben.

"Oh, yes—well. She was Sturge's eldest daughter."

"Did you know her father?"

"No, we didn't. We could never get to the bottom of it."

"Queer," suggested Reuben.

"Very!" answered the landlord. "But lor! that's nothin'; bastards be as common in Burstone as blackberries. Folks don't trouble the parson much here. He don't get fat out of marriage fees, and as to marriage bells, well, old Dangby, the sexton, ain't rung 'em for four or five year now."

"Where did Maggie Sturge live?" asked Reuben.

The landlord went to the door. "Dew you see them houses with the red palings at the bend of the road? Well, if I said she lived there, I should tell a lie, but if I were to say as how she lived in the first cottage past, just out of sight, I should speak truth."

"Thank you!" answered Reuben, and he went down the road to look at the cottage.

The next day Mr. Nettleby duly went to Mr. Grainger's office, and Reuben and another clerk were called in.

"To witness a deed," said Mr. Nettleby.

As Reuben signed his name he caught sight of "I hereby revoke all previous wills and codicils," and he

also saw higher up in the folio the words : "The said Margaret Sturge."

"It's all right, mother," said Reuben, when he returned home that night. "I can work the turkey now, and the turkey chick as well."

"Take care," said his mother. "Don't forsake the stony path, and climb, Reuben, always climb."

It was part of Reuben's duties to go from Norencaster to Rushmere every Saturday morning and take with him the morning's letters, for on that day Mr. Grainger did not go to business. He had to open them in front of his employer, making notes upon them as to what reply he was to make, and take general instructions concerning the business of the day. Mr. Grainger would sometimes receive him in the library or dining-room, and in the summer very often in the garden in a large summer-house. Nothing pleased Mr. Grainger so much as to have Maggie with him at these visits, and talk to Reuben in front of her, always in a most boastful way of the vastness of his business, and of his own energy and perseverance. Reuben was well trained, and knew exactly where to chime in, and what leading questions to ask. Figuratively speaking, he was always blacking his master's boots till they so shone that Mr. Grainger could see his own much-lauded image reflected in them. It will thus be seen that Reuben was brought frequently into contact with Maggie. At first he amused her with his fluent tongue and endless jokes, not always original or very clever, but still there was a quaint humour about the man that made his presence tolerable.

Reuben liked it best when he could get a few

words with Maggie without the presence of his employer. Sometimes she would be in the grounds alone, and he would go up to her in pretended search for his master. Reuben liked to talk about himself, but of course he had no chance in front of Mr. Grainger, as he was expected to do nothing but speak in praise of him. He disliked Kate Venner very much, for she was always sure to make some remark of ridicule at his expense. He could not flatter her by an appeal to her beauty as he could Maggie.

One day Reuben found Maggie alone in the grounds of The Mansion.

"Good morning, Miss Sturge!" he said.

"Good morning!" returned Maggie.

"I was walking out last Sunday, and I passed through Burstone. Isn't it a pretty village?"

"Very!" said Maggie. "It was my home."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Reuben, with feigned surprise. "I had never been there but once before. I was driving with Mr. Grainger. He was going somewhere on business, and then we had an accident."

"I remember it. I saw the accident, and there was a fight between Doctor John and Mr. Grainger, and then the coachman joined in, and John—I mean Doctor John—knocked them both down. He is very strong."

"So I thought too," observed Reuben.

"And you thought it best not to come to your master's assistance too," said Maggie, "or you would soon have been on the top of them both."

"Oh, no, Miss Sturge," replied Reuben, with

offended dignity. "I did not think it quite fair, you know, three to one."

"That was kind of you," said Maggie, in tones of slight satire.

"Did you like your home in the village?" inquired Reuben.

"Very much," returned Maggie. "Even now I sometimes think I would prefer its freedom to the restraints of society."

"I think you said once that your parents died when you were young, and that Doctor John adopted you."

"I don't think I ever told *you* so," said Maggie, "but it is correct."

"Then it must have been Mr. Grainger," observed Reuben, "who said your father died when you were young. He knew your father so well, you see."

"Did he?" asked Maggie, in surprise. "I did not know that."

"Oh, didn't you? Then I am afraid I am telling secrets; you see, I am a *con*-fidential clerk, and know everything. I expect I know more about your own father than you do."

"I never saw him," answered Maggie; "at least, I cannot remember him. He died when I was quite young."

"Did he?" replied Reuben. "Well, I must be getting back to the office now. I only came for some papers Mr. Grainger had left behind; and he could send nobody except myself, for things of a *con*-fidential character. I am one of those that see everything, and hear everything, and say nothing. But I fear I have told you more than I ought to this morning, but you won't say anything, will you, about

it to Mr. Grainger, my knowing who your father was? I won't tell anybody; you can rely on me being quite secret, miss. I won't breathe a word about anything I know to anyone else. Good morning!"

When Reuben returned to the warehouse at Norencester with his papers, he found Mr. Grainger alone.

"Now," thought Reuben, "I'll try and climb another rung of the ladder."

"I suppose you couldn't raise my salary, sir?" asked Reuben of Mr. Grainger.

"Raise your salary? Why, you get two hundred a year now," replied Mr. Grainger.

"A *con*-fidential clerk," said Reuben, with an accent on the "*con*," as though it would carry with it much weight and meaning, "is always worth studying and worth keeping."

Mr. Grainger was sitting in an easy-chair over the fire, and he replied to Reuben over his shoulder. He now turned round, looked him full in the face, and said: "What do you want?"

"A hundred a year more, Mr. Grainger."

"Then you won't get it, that's all," answered Mr. Grainger, turning round again to the fire.

"I don't want to leave, sir, but everyone must do the best they can for themselves."

"Certainly!" answered Mr. Grainger. "If you can get three hundred elsewhere—go and get it."

"Of course, wherever I go I take my information with me," observed Reuben.

"Oh, that's it, is it? Do you think I care that" (snapping his fingers) "for what information about my business you take to any competitor. No one can

stand against my capital. Ask the cashier for your week's salary in advance, and leave at once."

"That's not what I mean, Mr. Grainger," said Reuben, rubbing his hands together. "I said *con-fidential* information."

"You mean about my jokes borrowed from you, and notes for speeches, and so on. Well, what is a secretary for, but to do that sort of work. Leave at once."

"I don't mean that, Mr. Grainger. I mean family affairs."

"What family affairs?" asked Mr. Grainger, turning on him sharply.

"Margaret Sturge, late of Burstone, commonly known as Maggie, an illegitimate child of Thomas Grainger, Esquire," said Reuben. "I think it is worth a hundred a year, isn't it, just to keep that quiet?"

"How do you know that?" asked Mr. Grainger, rising from his seat, his face white with anger.

"I *know*," answered Reuben; "and it's worth an extra hundred a year, perhaps more."

"So you think you will blackmail me, do you?" said Mr. Grainger. "Tell who you like. What do I care. Who will believe you? And take care you don't go a step too far; there is such a thing as punishment for slander, you know."

"I did not think *you* would care a bit," answered Reuben.

"Who else should care, then?"

"Miss Maggie," answered Reuben.

It showed how selfish were Mr. Grainger's thoughts, that he had never once thought of it in that light.

"Women are very sensitive on that matter," observed Reuben, "and it might be just as well to take Miss Sturge into consideration."

Mr. Grainger was silent for a minute or two. The last thing he now wished for was a report of that character to reach the ears of Maggie. So turning to Reuben, he said :

"Don't you think it would pay you best to hold your tongue over it? You are down in my will now for something; you might find that altered by a codicil."

But Reuben was too sharp for that.

"A hundred a year now would be more to the point, sir. 'A bird in the hand'— You know the rest, sir?"

"Well, well," said Mr. Grainger, "we will say fifty."

"Couldn't do it. Very sorry," replied Reuben, moving to the door slowly.

"Seventy-five," said Mr. Grainger.

"Can't be done, sir. Worth a hundred."

"A hundred, then, and be damned to you," said Mr. Grainger.

"Thank you!" answered Reuben, as he went away.

When he got home that night, he said :

"Mother, I've got a hundred a year more now to help us along the stony path. I've climbed a bit, haven't I? I only had two pound a week, you know, when I first went there, and now I have got six," and he rubbed his hands together.

"My dear Reuben!" exclaimed Mrs. Starkham, "I am proud of you."

CHAPTER XXV

MONEY, LOVE, AND FAME: PHIL RESUMES

LOOKING back at the time when Youth, like a boat with pleasure at its helm, leaves the calm river it has so smoothly glided along for the deeper and more troubled seas of manhood, I turn to note if there are any landmarks by which I can trace its progress through that placid stream.

There are a few. They are the imprints of Money, Love, and Fame. I am no longer a junior clerk at the Foundry with "a knowledge of French." I have risen, and some of the foundrymen touch their hats to me as they pass me in the yard. Perhaps this chiefly characterises those who are in the habit of coming to me for an advance of money; but it matters not, they do it, and my vanity is flattered. More than once Mr. Strenbury has said: "Wilt thou be willing to receive an advance in thy wages?" an inquiry I have always answered in the affirmative; and it has been followed by a further question: "What dost thee have now?" Having informed Mr. Strenbury of the exact sum—always so well imprinted on my memory, and so faintly on his—it has been followed by the remark: "Thee might add ten shillings a week to it." I thank him, and inform the cashier, who, in his turn, acquaints Mr. Strenbury

with what I have told him, and receives the answer :
"The lad speaketh truth."

But I have acquired something else besides an addition to my wages. I have had the experience of being in love! It did not last long, perhaps, but the attack was severe when it came, and most uncomfortable. I was eighteen and she was twenty. I met her at Zion Chapel. It was not surprising that after meeting Ernest Venner at the Foundry I should go sometimes on Sundays to hear him preach. Indeed, John proposed it, and we often went together. I was introduced to the fair one, Lucy Starkham, by a fellow-clerk at the Foundry, who attended Zion Chapel. It was one Thursday evening, there had been a concert in the schoolroom, and she had sung "I love! I love! Love you?"

I did. How could I do otherwise, when such a bewitching creature asked the question. She was all dimples and smiles; and a dream, in which lace and chiffon, and sparkling eyes and rosy lips, all seemed mixed up together. But the mixture was most delightful, most intoxicating. I wished I had the chance of taking it like a doctor's prescription, "before meals" and "after meals," also "every four hours" and "when necessary to alleviate the pain." The pain was continuous, and I should have taken it always; I should have taken it for life.

When I shook hands with Lucy Starkham, I felt a thrill go right up my arm and down my back to my boots. I stammered out something about how I had enjoyed her most charming song, and she said:

"It is good of you, Mr. Ditch, to say so. Do you like music?"

Of course, I doted on music as I doted on her. I told her the former, and longed to tell her the latter. I saw her again next Sunday, when she passed me with a most bewitching bow. I went to chapel twice that Sunday; but I only saw her in the evening. Probably she stayed at home in the morning with her hair in curl-papers and helped her mother do the cooking. I have written this sentence now in cold blood after the lapse of years; but if anyone had said this to me *then*, and thus associated her name with anything so common, I should have felt like throttling him!

I took a sitting in the chapel, but found it too far away from the dear one, so I soon discovered that it was draughty. I moved to one nearer to her, where I could hear her singing, and drink in all the sweet melody of her voice.

On week days, during my dinner-hour, I would wander about the city in the hopes of meeting her; but I never did, and so had to be content with staring at the outside of her father's shop. But china memorial wreaths and brass coffin-plates—for her father was an undertaker—were, after all, a poor substitute for the face of the dear one.

On what excuse could I go into the shop? There was a little office at the end, and it occurred to me that she might be there doing her father's books. I could not well go in and order my own coffin, yet that to me seemed the only business excuse I could invent!

But something happened I had not even thought of. There occurred one day at the Foundry a

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serious accident, in which two men were killed. Mr. Strenbury called me and said :

"The Almighty has thought fit to call these two men to Him. It is our duty to make provision for their wives, and also to see that their bodies are decently and fittingly buried. Go thee up to the town, to one Stuggins, an undertaker, and make arrangements for two coffins to be made forthwith in which to convey the poor, mangled bodies to their last resting-place."

"Would Starkham do as well, sir?" I said. "I know Mr. Starkham."

"Just as thee wilt. It matters little who doeth it."

I went at once to Mr. Starkham, and found him—alas! not his daughter—in the little office in the rear of his shop. He was a fat, red-faced, bullet-headed man.

I had met Mr. Starkham once or twice before at the chapel, and once I had met him in his stable. I had gone there with John, who was attending a horse.

As I entered the shop I thought I would not hurry with my business; *she* might come in while I was there, and the longer I remained the greater would be the chance of my seeing her.

"Good morning, Mr. Starkham! I did not have the pleasure of seeing you at chapel yesterday," I remarked.

"No," he said, "I heard as there would be a special reference made in prayer for one of the congregation who is very ill. It is not nice for the relatives to see the undertaker sitting there, all ready for the job, is it? So I stay away. And on the

other hand, business is business ; people must die some day, and it ain't nice to have your trade prayed against, is it ? ”

I said “ No,” and then I asked: “ Is Mrs. Starkham quite well ? I did not see her either. And Miss Starkham ? ” I added, blushing very red.

“ Lor ! they are both of 'em well, but they have just the same feeling about a job as I have,” returned the undertaker.

“ I have brought you a little business,” I said. “ I am sorry there has been a fatal accident.”

“ Never mind where it is ; we are always ready for it. ‘ Distance no object,’ as I says on the sign over my door.”

“ It's at the Foundry,” I said.

“ Not surprised,” observed Mr. Starkham. “ You have often given the doctors a job ; but not many to an undertaker. Well, I am glad you have brought the job to me, and not to Stuggins—he had the last.” (Stuggins, as the reader may imagine, was the rival undertaker.) “ Look at his hearse and look at mine. Now I put it to you, Mr. Ditch. Which would you sooner have carry you ? ”

I thanked him, and said : “ Neither.”

“ Quite so ; quite so ! but you must admit mine is a smart turn-out. Look at my coaches, with nice, wide, comfortable seats to sit in, and look at the length of our horses' tails. Do you know they cost two pounds a yard ? Why, they cost four times as much as my wife's wedding-dress did.”

I said I was surprised to hear this, as I supposed they grew.

“ Of course, they did once,” said Mr. Starkham.

"But it's very few horses have long, full tails; and when a horse *do* have one, it don't go to the cat's-meat, man, like his body, when he's done his last journey; it goes to funerals for ever."

"And what about the mane?" I inquired.

"Oh, that's never false; we crimp it like a lady does her hair. But let's get back to business, Mr. Ditch, about this job. Now, we never care about trusting the corpses' relatives. They are like people who have pet canaries, and who rush off to the taxidermist in their first frantic grief, and then forget to call for them. Where is the taxidermist if he doesn't have his money first? Sold! Where are we, Mr. Ditch? Sold!"

I hastened to assure him that these "corpses' relations" would have nothing to do with the matter of payment.

"We do that," I said, with a touch of conscious pride. "Strenbury & Strenbury, you know, are good enough for *that*, I think, Mr. Starkham."

"Strenbury & Strenbury could bury the whole town," returned Mr. Starkham, "and I would like to have the order. Trade is certainly better," continued Mr. Starkham, rubbing his hands, "and it is time it was. Healthy, long-lived people are the Norencesterites. Why, only the other day, I saw an old countryman, and I said to him: 'You look a hale old man.' 'Why,' he said, 'you don't call me old, do you? I am only seventy. I call my father *old*, he's ninety-four.' Now, Mr. Ditch, doesn't that sort of thing take the pluck out of any undertaker? If a man has not had a good innings at seventy, when has he?"

I said he had my sympathy, and I then proceeded

to give him definite instructions concerning the poor fellows at the Foundry. While I was speaking to him, Mrs. Starkham, a fat, jovial lady, came forward, but alas! no Miss Starkham.

"I wonder," said Mr. Starkham, "whether Mr. Ditch would stay and have tea with us? We are homely sort of people."

I said I should be delighted.

"We are driving out this evening, ain't we, love? We could take Mr. Ditch to Burstone on our way."

"So we could," assented Mrs. Starkham heartily.

I asked at what time they had tea.

"We toasts a muffin at half-past five," said Mrs. Starkham, "unless Dan has done a job a long way off."

"I generally enjoys my tea, especially if it has been a good 'un. I don't mean parish cases," remarked Mr. Starkham. "I mean a job that does you credit."

I returned to the Foundry highly delighted with my invitation. It wanted three hours to tea-time, and I fear I spent the greater part of that in front of the mirror. I bought another tie as I went along, and I think I spent an hour before I had arranged it quite to my satisfaction. I parted and re-parted my hair till the division was as straight as the edge of a mathematical rule. I brushed my clothes till my arm ached, and polished my boots till my face shone in them. Then I placed my hat on my head, just a little sideways, to see the effect, and approving of it, went forth. I gave a shilling for a rose; I remember they were then out of season and very scarce.

"Young gents," said the girl at the florist's,

"generally likes a nice little bud to go with it, and a bit of maidenhair at the back."

I said I would have it, trying to look as if I knew all about it, and that it was quite an everyday occurrence.

Then she pinned it in my coat, and said : " I wonder how long it will stay there ? " making me blush as red as any geranium in her shop. As I went along I bought a few cigars. I did not smoke myself, but I thought I ought to offer one to the father of my fair divinity. I arrived exactly to time, and we sat down to tea in the little parlour at the rear of the shop, having through the glass door a good view of memorial wreaths and coffins. As we sat down to tea I noticed there were four plates set on the table, and I looked round in eager expectancy for the coming of Miss Starkham, but she did not appear. Mr. Starkham got up and went to the door, of course to call her. To my horror, he shouted : " Dick, Dick ! Where is that young imp ? "

" I am coming, father," answered a voice, which seemed to come from the shop. I looked that way, and there beheld a head of short, brown curly hair rise slowly out of a coffin.

" I won't have you reading in those best padded coffins. If you must lie down and read, choose a parish shell," said Mr. Starkham angrily.

" Drat the boy ! " said Mrs. Starkham ; " and I'll warrant he's dirtied all that domette I put there. Boys are that aggravating, Mr. Ditch," she added.

Mr. Starkham passed me the muffin, and I took a piece and tried to eat, and it seemed almost to choke me. The boy from the coffin came and sat by my

side. He took a large piece of muffin and put it on the fourth plate.

Thus vanished my dream ! I came especially to sit beside my dear divinity, and I had for my companion a resuscitated corpse—or thus it seemed to me. But the corpse had a marvellous appetite, and stuffed its mouth full of muffin, washing it down with tea ; then it took a two-square-inch block of plum-cake and placed it on the tips of the fingers of one hand opened out flat, and gave it a sharp bang with the other, that made the cake fly upwards into a mouth opened wide. The mouth caught it with a snap, and then mumbled out : “ Can you do that, Mr. Ditch ? ”

I said : “ No, I wasn't so clever.”

“ I *would* try, if I *were* you,” said Dick, and he touched the chair ; “ *wood*, you know ; see the joke ? ” and expected me to laugh.

I felt inclined to kick him.

“ Dick is clever at puns,” said Mrs. Starkham, with pride. “ But you ought to hear my Reuben make jokes. He is a clever young man, and will sure to climb.”

Presently I asked where Miss Starkham was. I yet hoped she might come in before I left.

“ Oh, Lucy has gone to London for two or three days,” said Mr. Starkham. “ Sly little puss ! She's gone for a purpose. When she comes back, I expect she will have a ring on her finger.”

“ You—you don't mean married ? ” I stammered out.

“ No, no ; only engaged,” returned Mr. Starkham. “ You're going a little too fast. A wedding ain't like a funeral, it will keep, you know. Have a piece

of plum-cake ; you are not getting on. It will lie a-top of that muffin first-rate. Muffins are puffy things, that want something heavy to sit on them. There is nothing will do that like a plum-cake made by the missus," he added, with a sly wink.

"Dan, that is unkind of you," returned Mrs. Starkham, and she folded her fat hands, pretending to look hurt.

What more was said I know not ; for me all interest had vanished, and I was glad when tea was finished. Mrs. Starkham said something about "my Reuben," which I took to be her son, whom she would so like me to know, as he was "one of the coming young men," that "he patiently trod the stony path," and that he was "climbing up the ladder at Grainger's, and would soon be sitting on the top rung."

When tea was finished, Dick was told to go and "put Bess in the trap," which, I concluded, was the horse and vehicle to convey me to Burstone. It might have taken me to Burstone Churchyard, for all I cared. Life seemed a dismal blank.

Dick said : "Would you like to see the horses in the stable ?" I said "Yes." Not that I wanted to do so, but the little back parlour seemed to choke me. I went and watched him put a black horse into a dog-cart. It had a long mane, but only a tail of ordinary length. Before he harnessed it, he took a large sponge and pail of water and washed the horse. The water in the pail, when he rinsed the sponge, which he did frequently, became like ink. When I looked at the horse, I saw here and there large white and light grey spots appearing. There

were six or seven of these as big as one's hand in different parts of the coat. They would be carefully blackened when the horse was used for business again on the morrow.

To me it was a dismal ride to Burstone, but Mr. and Mrs. Starkham seemed much to enjoy it, chatting and laughing heartily all the way, losing no chance of having a joke, however grim it was.

As we drove along, Mr. Starkham told me a few stories of his home and of his life ; but I cannot say they were of a very cheering character, and I was certainly glad when he set me down at John's cottage, and drove on.

Thus ended the first chapter of Love.

I now turn to that of *Fame*. I soon find it to be a long way to walk twice a day from Burstone to Norencester, and I find that all the eloquence of Mr. Venner now fails to take me more than once. I soon discover there is a fresh draught, and remove my sitting to another part of the chapel. I don't want to stand and listen to Miss Starkham's shrill voice, always out of tune.

As I have said, I have done with Love, and I court Fame. I pose as a young philosopher, but I don't dress in an unkempt, slovenly way ; I wish my person to suggest the cultured Byronic philosophy, which combines with deep thought much wit and brilliance, rather than to remind one of the slippered sage of the study. I wear my hair long, in curls that reach almost to my shoulders, and I train a lock to come low on my forehead ; I wear a flowered silk waistcoat and a very elaborate tie. I join the Young

Men's Mutual Improvement Society and the Norencester Debating Club. I am getting quite a clever speaker, or at least I think I am; and I talk about matters of which I know nothing, with all the assurance of a Prime Minister. I am particularly great upon the subject, "Shall we disestablish the Church?" discussed by the young men of Zion Chapel. I have recently become a member of this community, and I consider myself to be quite a strong pillar of Nonconformity. I talk with all the enthusiasm of the young recruit of the rapacity and bigotry of the Anglican Church. I denounce it for clinging to its ill-gotten gold, wrung from the downtrodden poor. Will we, the young men of Norencester, suffer this ecclesiastical tyrant to live in our midst? Its breath is pestilence, its seed is corruption. "No," I cry. "Down with this monument of bigotry," and flourishing my hand, I resume my seat, amid loud cheers.

A few days after this speech, I have practical experience of the "monument of bigotry" that I had denounced with such fervour.

Mr. Venner had arranged for some celebrated Nonconformist minister to preach at Zion Chapel. What the subject was I forget, but it was advertised on a large poster, which cordially invited all to Zion Chapel.

It so happened that the man who usually did the bill-sticking was ill, and John had said: "I'll stick some of them bills for 'em, Phil, after I done for the day." John's offer was gladly accepted. To my surprise, he asked me if I would accompany him and carry the paste-pot. I don't think it ever occurred

to John that the long curls, the silk vest and Byronic philosophy, to say nothing of my position at the Foundry, made the occupation to be one altogether out of keeping with my dignity. But I did not like to offend him—and what, after all, should I have been but for his kindness, save a workhouse boy? So I consented, just hinting that we need not start till after dark. But I got on better than I thought I should. There was a certain amount of excitement about it, and I was scarce out of my teens, and with a boy's love of fun. When we had stuck bills on all the usual places, we had still a dozen or two left over.

"Let's put a plaster on old Grainger's shop shutter," said John.

"All right!" said I. "I will do that. You carry the paste-pot for a change."

I quickly stuck it on his shutters. Then I put one round the pillar-box, and next one on Starkham's shop. I had the spirit of devilry in me, and I did not care what I did. As we passed the Police Station I saw it was all quiet, so I stuck one on its notice-board. On our way home we passed the Cathedral, and I could hear the distant booming and rumbling of the deep notes of the organ; possibly the organist was practising.

"I say, what a lark, John, to put one on the door of the Cathedral."

"I don't think I would, mate, if I was you," answered John.

But I *would*; and having carefully pasted a poster, I went up to the door and stuck it on securely. I had just done so, and was turning away, when I felt a hand on my shoulder.

"What's that?" said the gruff voice of a policeman. "Just you wait a bit; you will have to come to the Station for this."

As he spoke, he turned his bull's-eye lantern on to the bill, and commenced slowly reading it.

"What are you looking at?" was the inquiry of a figure clad all in black, that came up behind us.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the policeman, "but it shan't stay here long. I'll soon tear it down. I will come back and do it when I have took him to the Station. I caught him in the very act."

Looking closely at the new-comer, I saw, to my surprise, that it was the Dean. He read the poster, then looked at me intently, and in a moment he comprehended the whole situation.

"No," he said, "do not take it down; I wish it to stay there. Let your prisoner go." Then, turning to me, he said: "Good-night, sir! I think you are over-zealous in your cause; but better that than no zeal at all. We will let your bill stay where it is. 'He that is not against us is for us.'"

With that remark, he made me a dignified bow and passed into the Cathedral.

"Well, I am blest!" said the policeman. "Sacrilege sanctioned by the Dean!"

I felt the dignified rebuke more keenly than if the Dean had torn the bill down in anger and sent me to the Police Station.

I need scarcely say after that I spoke no more of the Church as a "monument of bigotry."

CHAPTER XXVI

MAGGIE

I WAS sitting one Sunday morning with John in the "best parlour," idly looking out of the window, watching the rain. I remember it was a cold autumn day, and the garden, the road, and the fields beyond looked very dreary.

"Churches nor chapels won't be full to-day," observed John; "but never mind, if it is bad for sinners, it is good for tu'nips."

"You don't ought to joke about sinners as you do," observed Sarah. "It's really wicked."

"Do you think so? Let's change the subject. I wonder how my little Maggie is this morning. I wonder if she feels like I do—as if I had got the pip."

"She's all right," exclaimed Sarah. "She is not out in this wet—only the coachman. I call it a sin to go to chapel or church like that. She is lolling back in the cushions of her carriage. That's what my lady is doing. One of these days," continued Sarah, "she will find out something that will bring her pride down, I'll warrant."

"We needn't talk about that," observed John, "she can't help it. It's no disgrace to her—poor girl!"

"Opinions differ," answered Sarah, walking away.

John continued to look out of the window, and seemed restless. As a rule, if it were wet on Sundays, he would read the paper and smoke his pipe ; to-day he did neither.

"What is the matter, John?" I asked. "Not smoking nor reading?"

"Can't tell you, Phil ; I feel restless. I have been thinking about that mare of Squire Benthorne's, the poor brute was in such pain last night. I think I must put on a coat and go and see if it's all right. Why, that's the gate," he exclaimed. "Look ! it's Maggie." John flew to the road in the pouring rain without his hat and brought her in.

"Why, Maggie ! fancy you coming a day like this ; and look ! you are wet through." So saying, he kissed her, pulled off her cloak, and then knelt down and took off her shoes. Maggie kissed John, but I noticed she scarcely spoke either to him or to me.

"Allus glad to see you," exclaimed John ; "and it is good of you, my dear, to come and take pot luck with us, and through all this wet, too."

There was a pained expression on Maggie's face, as though his words were a reproach to her. John did not mean them so ; his voice being kind and natural.

All of a sudden, Maggie looked at John, held out her hands in an entreating way, and then burst into tears.

"Why, what's the matter, my little mate?" asked John tenderly, and taking hold of her hand. "Why, what's upset you ; what's wrong?"

"I want to come back," said Maggie.

There was, I thought, a touch of shame in her

voice and look, and in the way in which she hung her head.

"Allus a home here," answered John cheeringly. "It's rough, but it's ready."

"I have left The Mansion," said Maggie, with a shudder at the name, "never to return. I want you to let me stay here till I can find work."

"That you shall, my dear, and don't be in any hurry to find work. There is no need for it. Can you tell us why you have left, my dear, or would you rather not?"

"I will tell you some day," she said, shuddering again. "I—I can't tell you now."

"When you choose, little mate, there is no hurry," said John kindly. "And now get some of these wet things off. Sarah will lend you some of hers." So saying, he went to the door and called his sister, who was evidently busy cooking, for at length, after repeated calling, she came forward with her hands covered with flour.

John said: "Here is Maggie come back to stay with us, and she is wet through; lend her some of your things."

"Pity she did not say she was coming," exclaimed Sarah, "the joint ain't big enough. No, I cannot shake hands; mine are all over flour. We have to work in a cottage; can't loll in easy-chairs all day and read novels."

"The joint is quite big enough," answered John, "and if it weren't, Maggie would be welcome to my share. Take her upstairs, and let her get off some of the wet things."

"Sarah is larrupy with her tongue agen this

morning," said John, turning to me as they quitted the room. "I hope she will take kindly like to the little mate. But she ain't little now, is she, though I called her so? Why, she has growed a fine gal, ain't she?"

In a few minutes Maggie came back, dressed partly in her own clothes and partly in those belonging to Sarah.

"The dress wants a tuck," she said, with a smile. "Sarah is still taller than I am. And do I look a guy? It's getting near the 5th of November."

But Maggie said this with an evident effort to be gay, and soon lapsed into silence; she seemed very far from herself. John did all he could to be bright and cheerful; but whatever he did or said failed to gladden her.

When we sat down to dinner, Sarah said:

"You will find this a poor place, after the grandeur you have been having. Sorry we have no finger bowls."

"She won't find our hearts changed," said John.

"Silence for grace," exclaimed Sarah, rapping the table with her knife. Then she bent her head and said:

"For the least of these Thy mercies, O Lord, we thank Thee. Amen."

We had never heard her say this grace before; of course, it was an allusion to Maggie's return.

John pretended not to notice it, so did I.

Looking round the table, Sarah said: "Ah, sorry we have no table-napkins. Can you manage without?"

"Of course I can," said Maggie.

"What wine do you drink?" asked Sarah. "I am sorry we have no wine."

"I always drink water," answered Maggie.

I tried to change the subject, and divert Sarah's thoughts from Maggie, but I was not successful. She soon noticed that poor Maggie was making but little progress with the meal, and snappishly said :

"Our food is not good enough for my lady of The Mansion."

"Maggie's thawts ain't all on her wittles," remarked John. "The poor girl is upset—leave her alone."

"Please forgive me," said Maggie. "I shall find my appetite by-and-by."

"For a seven o'clock dinner, no doubt," observed Sarah satirically. "You will hear the dinner-gong ring."

"Remarks like those," said John, "are hardly the best sauce to make her want her wittles. There were a time when you and your Dick and child had no home. I did not talk to you like *that*."

"I don't see why you want always to be raking up my husband and little one," said Sarah, "specially at meals. It don't improve the appetite."

"I shan't mention it again," remarked John. "Give Phil some more pie."

"That boy is always eating," observed Sarah.

"Of course he is," answered John.

"Well," remarked Sarah, "if Maggie is going to eat like him—"

"She will in time, I hope," answered John.

"They will eat us out of house and home."

"So much the better," said John.

We all felt relieved when the meal came to an end ;

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but there was a renewal of it at tea and supper, and when it was near bed-time, Sarah said :

"Can you undress, Miss Maggie, without the assistance of a lady's-maid ?"

"That will do, Sarah," said John. "I'll not have any more of it."

For a little time Sarah was subdued, but it broke out again in the morning, and continued for several days. I saw that Maggie felt it very much, and John, I think, even more so.

It was about the fourth day after that Maggie took the opportunity when John was alone to say to him: "Who was my father?"

"I don't know," answered John.

"Was my mother married when I was born?" she asked, with some hesitancy.

"I don't know, my dear. I rather fear not. Your grandfather would never speak about your father."

"Do you think," asked Maggie, with a shudder, "his name was Grainger?"

"I have thought so the last few years," answered John; "but don't worry about it, little mate, we love you just the same."

"I know you do," answered Maggie.

"Who has told you anything?" asked John. "Not this Grainger?"

"No," answered Maggie; "but his secretary, Reuben Starkham. He made love to me, and because I refused him, he told me of the stain upon my birth. He said he would keep that secret if I married him; and if I didn't, he would tell everyone."

"Tell me what he is like," said John. "I'll find

him and horsewhip him. And what about Grainger—what did he say?”

“I have left him a letter. I felt I could not see him. I said I could never return. I feel as if I could never forgive him. The whole thing is most repulsive to me to think of—to feel that all that gay crowd half guess it as Starkham did, and point the finger of shame at me. I never want to see any of them again—never want to see anyone but you and Phil. Why did Mr. Grainger adopt me? It is too apparent. John! John! you can’t say it isn’t true, can you?”

“I can’t, Maggie, I can’t. For your sake, I am sorry; but it will make no difference to us.”

Maggie was silent for some time, then she said: “How do women get into convents, John?”

“I am sure I don’t know—never been in a convent myself,” said John, with a smile. “But cheer up, little mate, you will feel better in a day or two. Why, one day some fine fellow as is worthy of you will come along, and you will marry him; and you can’t if you are in a convent—now, can you?”

But the days went by, and Maggie did not cheer up, and Sarah’s tongue grew more bitter, making all three of us very unhappy. Maggie tried to get a situation as governess, but two or three weeks went by, and she was not successful. It was about three weeks after Maggie had been with us, that John said to me:

“I have been thinking of something, Phil. It comes out of what Maggie has been telling me. She feels this stain of birth.”

“I have felt it too, sometimes,” I said. “The world will sneer.”

"But a man feels it little compared to a woman," observed John; "and now, what is to be done? She has been telling me she thinks of entering a convent, and she asks my advice. Of course, I tried to cheer her up."

"I am sure you would," I said.

"But I can't; you have no idea how keenly she feels it. I told her this feeling will pass away and she would forget it. Now, there is another thing, Phil. Sarah has been in her tantrums ever since Maggie came back, and she don't get any better. She gets worse. What is to be done? Maggie can't live here and be unhappy."

"She will go out as a governess, by-and-by," I said.

"She may; but here is something else. Jim Thorman's business at Norencester is for sale. It's much bigger than mine, and there is a shoeing forge as well. I have saved, as you know, a few hundred pounds—enough to buy it. I could go there and take Maggie, and you too, Phil, old chap, and leave Sarah here; the off-license will keep her. But I could only take Maggie with me as my wife. What think you of it? Tell me straight."

I said I thought it would be a most excellent thing, and I was quite sure Maggie could not be other than happy—she loved no one else.

"I don't quite know, Phil, what to do; but could you just talk to her, throw out a few hints like, and see how she fare to take it?"

I promised John I would. It was several days before I had a chance of speaking to Maggie alone. I turned the matter over in my mind, and to me

it seemed the best thing for their mutual happiness. I loved John, and I was very anxious to bring it about. I thought I would do little by vague hinting—then I was young, enthusiastic in my cause—and lacking in discretion. I suppose at the time I must have been about twenty, rather young to act in so delicate a matter. I spoke as youth would, and I fear very bluntly, but undoubtedly to the purpose.

"Maggie," I said to her one day, "did you ever think of marrying?"

"No," she answered; "I shall never marry."

"Not if someone loved you very much, and you loved him?"

"I shall never allow myself now to love anyone very much. I am too proud—yes, that is what it is—pride. I must tell them all, and I can't."

"Maggie," I said, "John loves you, and will make you his wife. Will you marry him?"

"Did John ask you to say this?"

"No; not all this. But he sees you are not happy, and he wants to buy that business at Norencester you heard him once speak of, and he wants to go and live there, and take you—and leave Sarah here—so will you go as his wife?"

"If John wishes—yes," was the answer.

"But you don't love him?" I asked.

"No," she said; "but he has always been good to me."

"Maggie," I said, after a while, "you don't love anyone else, do you?"

"I did," she said; "but that is nothing. It can

never be. I am not the heiress now. I am only a very poor girl."

"And I may tell dear old John you will be his wife?"

"You may."

"It is good of you, Maggie."

"John has been very good to me," was the quiet answer.

I threw my cap in the air. "That's splendid," I said. "Have not I got something to tell John!"

When John returned that evening, I went with him into the stable to help him put his mare up for the night.

"You can buy the business," I said. "Maggie will go with you."

"As my wife?"

"Yes; it's fine. Won't I just pelt you with rice at your wedding?"

"But I must speak to her. The little mate must have time to think about it. 'Taint fair for her to rush into it so. Perhaps in her heart she is agen it, and won't say so for fear of hurting my feelings like."

That evening, as we three were in the front room alone—fortunately, Sarah had gone out—John spoke to Maggie. He said:

"Maggie, Phil has been telling me something that has made me glad, more glad than I ought ever to hope for; but it ain't *that* as was in my thoughts, it's you, little mate. What is best for you. Would you be happy so?"

"Yes," was the answer.

"Thank you, my dear," said John, and he kissed her. But it was not returned with the light, fond

kiss she had hitherto always given him. Neither was there the passionate embrace of the woman who loves. Maggie was simply passive ; but John was happy ; he thought the deeper love would come in time, and if he could make Maggie happy, that was everything. Then he said gaily : " You won't take the convent veil now, Maggie, but another sort of veil, eh ? "

CHAPTER XXVII

A RACE

THE letter left by Maggie for Mr. Grainger merely said that she now knew something that made it quite impossible for her to remain at The Mansion. That was all. The subject was indelicate and repulsive to her. Mr. Grainger, of course, guessed at once to what her letter referred, but it did not occur to him that Starkham had any hand in the matter. The letter did not even say where she had gone to, but Mr. Grainger readily surmised. The thing was to get her back. How should he set about it? He knew it would be useless for either him or Miss Venner to attempt to persuade her to return. He must get her back either by force or strategy. He hoped, if he could once succeed in doing this, he could then induce her to stay. He turned the matter over in his mind for several days ; but no satisfactory way presented itself.

One day Reuben said to him : " So Miss Sturge has left, sir ? "

" Yes ; thinks she prefers to pig in a cottage than to live in luxury at The Mansion."

" Could not she be got back, sir ? "

" I don't know. I don't see how."

" I think it could be done, sir, with a little

managing. Drive up to the village in the carriage—not too near the house—then send some child with a message that Doctor John wanted her. Be sure, of course, that he wasn't in the cottage. Oh, I could manage it. We could then lift her into the carriage, and drive off at full speed."

"Risky," exclaimed Mr. Grainger, "decidedly risky; but I confess I don't know any other way; and besides, why shouldn't a father have his own child?"

"A beautiful girl like that to live with a common lout of a horse doctor—an unmarried man, too. It's not the thing, sir. You would be quite right in using force."

"But I think his sister lives with him," observed Mr. Grainger.

"Still, the means justify the end," observed Reuben.

A few days after this occurrence, Mr. Grainger decided to carry out Starkham's suggestion, and he and his secretary were driven to Burstone. It was arranged that the carriage should wait on the village green, while Starkham went forward to make inquiries, and report what would be best to do.

They took with them the same coachman that years before had driven them through Burstone, and had received a thrashing from Doctor John. The man was taken into their confidence, but he did not look forward with pleasure to another encounter. The fight was twelve or thirteen years ago, but he had not yet quite forgotten it. It was too forcibly impressed upon his memory. The three drove over to Burstone, and when a hundred yards

from the cottage, Reuben got out of the carriage and walked ahead. Looking about, he saw a young girl, and he asked her if she knew Miss Sturge.

"What, the one as has been a grand lady?" asked the child.

"Yes," said Reuben; "will you tell her that Miss Kate Venner is waiting out here on the green to see her?"

"Yes."

"What name did I say?"

"Kate Venner."

"That's right. Now don't forget it."

He sent the child on, ran back to the carriage and jumped in.

"Now, sir," said Reuben, "she will come out into the road directly in this direction. I said Kate Venner was on the green. The cottage is just round the bend of the road, she can't see us from here. Directly she is visible, drive towards her, stop suddenly when we reach her. Then you and I jump out and lift her into the carriage, and then drive back home."

It was a closed carriage they were in, and Maggie once inside, they could soon stop her being seen, and if she screamed, Reuben would place his handkerchief over her mouth till they were out of the village.

Doctor John was not at home, or he would probably have come out with Maggie. In a very few minutes Mr. Grainger and Reuben had the pleasure of seeing their plot was a success, for she came walking up the road towards them, and quite alone. The coachman drove quickly forward, pulled his horses up sharp in

front of her, and out jumped Mr. Grainger and Reuben, leaving the carriage door open behind them.

"Kate is in the carriage," said Reuben, getting behind her.

"This way, my dear," said Mr. Grainger, catching hold of her arm.

Maggie struggled, but it was of no avail, for the coachman sprang off his box, and the three of them quickly forced her in, and drove quickly away.

But an old man, the cripple of the village, had witnessed the scene, and he limped towards Doctor John's cottage as fast as his legs would allow him. He knocked at the door, and made Sarah hear.

"Where's the Doctor?" he exclaimed.

"Out, of course," said Sarah sharply, "and you needn't come begging here, for you won't get anything."

"I don't want anything. I want to tell him that I saw Maggie Sturge, she what's been a lady, forced into a carriage by two gentlemen, and they drove off sharp, Rushmere way."

"And a good job too," said Sarah. "But here he comes. Can't you hear the mare's step? Now don't you say anything about it. I'll give you half-a-crown if you don't."

"I shall tell 'un," said the cripple stoutly. "He's powerful kind to me, and I ain't going to forget it."

At that very moment Doctor John sprang from his mare, and opened the gate.

"They have been taking your lady away," said the beggar—"Sturge's lass that were."

"Who's taken her? Where? How long ago? Speak man, quick!"

"Not three minutes. You must have passed a closed carriage, didn't yur? They forced her in. I see'd it all."

In an instant, Doctor John seized one of the cripple's crutches, being the handiest weapon he could lay his hand upon, and springing to his horse, galloped after the carriage.

"Go it, my beauty!" he said, patting the mare's neck. "Fly like the very devil!"

As John rode away, Sarah said to the cripple:

"There, you have lost your crutch, more fool you. Ten to one he will break it."

"He will give me a new one if he does," said the man, "and I want a new 'un. That's the worst of being lame, your crutches do wear out, and they are so powerful expensive."

Doctor John knew every road that led to Rushmere, and guessed the one they would most probably take. But the carriage was two miles on the way before he caught it up. It travelled quickly, and had had several minutes' start. As Doctor John neared it, he called to the coachman to stop. The man made no reply, but whipped up his horses. Doctor John patted the neck of his mare, and said: "Go it, my beauty!" In a few seconds he was alongside of the carriage. He called to the driver again to stop.

"Go to the devil," said the man sneeringly.

Maggie had seen Doctor John, and called out frantically to him. He shouted out again to the coachman to stop, and flourished the cripple's crutch above his head.

"Stop!" he cried, "or I'll knock you off your perch."

For answer, the man struck Doctor John with the butt-end of his whip, a compliment which the former returned with a blow from his crutch that knocked the coachman off his seat, and sent him sprawling into the ditch, having a very narrow escape of going under the wheels of the carriage. The next thing to do was to stop the horses. Doctor John's first thought was to push their heads from him by the aid of his crutch, and overturn the whole thing in the ditch; but then he thought of Maggie. In doing this he might injure her, and perhaps severely. To stop the horses was impossible, as the reins were hanging loose on the other side, dragging on the road. What was to be done? He rode along beside the vehicle thinking, taking no notice of Mr Grainger, who, now terrified, had lowered the window, and was calling to John to stop the horses.

"How can I stop the horses, you fool! I could stop one, not two. It would serve you right if I let you smash up, and I would, if it weren't for Maggie."

Poor Maggie was terrified, and was calling: "Help me, John, do help me!"

"All right, my mate, I will directly," called back John, "and I'll settle accounts with them varminths too."

He tried to stop the carriage by catching hold of the rein of the nearest horse, but it only served to make the horse and carriage swerve towards him. There was only one thing to be done: ride well ahead, dismount, catch hold of the reins, and hang on by the heads of the horses till he brought them to a standstill. It was a very dangerous thing to do, but John was a man of fearless courage. No sooner had

the thought occurred to him than he dashed ahead, dismounted, and waited for the carriage. Then he sprang at the bridle of the horse beside him, caught it, and allowed himself to be dragged along several yards till he brought the vehicle to a standstill.

Grainger sprang out of the carriage. His fear had left him now danger was passed, and insolence returned.

"What do you mean by knocking my coachman down?" he said.

"Well, I'm d—d!" was John's exclamation, as soon as he regained breath.

"You will have to answer for this," said Reuben. "We shall give you in charge as soon as we meet a policeman."

"And I will give both of you into custody for an outrage on Miss Sturge; taking her away with violence. The man whose crutch I've got here saw you. You are a couple of blackguards."

"Are we?" said Reuben. "You will find out to your cost that your word is nothing against that of two gentlemen."

John was panting for breath. He said nothing for a few minutes, but sat down on the bank. Maggie went up to him.

"Oh, John, it is good of you! You might have been killed," she cried.

"A thundering good job if he had been," said Mr. Grainger. "Fellows like him we can do without all right."

John said nothing. He was gaining breath, and thinking what best to do.

"And you won't come with me, Maggie," said Mr.

Grainger, "after all I have done for you—all the money I have spent on you?"

"No," answered Maggie firmly. "I can never go back with you; and after this, how can you ask me?"

"But I do. I've made my will, Maggie. I've left you everything, and you would have a good dowry when you married. What have I done that you should leave me?"

It was Doctor John who answered him.

"You've let her come into the world with a stain on her birth. She feels it more than you think of, and that man knows it, and tries to make love to Maggie. She stayed with you as long as she could bear it, and then she came back to me. You betrayed her mother, and now you expect her to love you. What, are you a fool as well as a villain?"

Grainger turned angrily on his secretary.

"I see now why she has found this out. So you wanted to marry her. You wanted my money. Go; I have done with you," he said.

"Yes; but you haven't closed my lips. A confidential clerk knows a thing or two it's not nice to have talked of everywhere."

"I don't know that I care a bit," said Mr. Grainger.

Reuben said nothing. He knew he did, and that he had won the game.

"Maggie, will you come back? I will see that this man does not make love to you any more," said Mr. Grainger pleadingly.

"Will you go back, Maggie?" inquired John.

"Not if I were starving," said Maggie.

"I am almost," said Doctor John. "I've had no

dinner. I fare to want summat. Get in the carriage, my dear. I'll drive you back myself. The livery ain't very smart," he said, looking at his clothes, "and I ain't got a cockade in my hat, but I can drive. These here gentlemen will have to get on to Rushmere on foot, or wait until I've done with the carriage."

"You leave that carriage alone!" exclaimed Grainger. John's remark seemed so audacious, he had not grasped his meaning at first.

"And if I don't?" asked John.

"I will soon stop you," said Grainger, catching hold of the reins.

"And I, too, you low villain!" called out Reuben.

"Maggie, get in the carriage," said Doctor John. "Now then, stand aside, the two of yur."

Grainger still clutched the reins.

"Come on, then," said Doctor John, "the pair of yur," and in the twinkling of an eye he took off his coat.

But Mr. Grainger knew by experience what Doctor John was like when he pulled off his coat, so he loosened his hold of the reins, and said:

"Now then, Reuben, you are younger than I am—just thirty, in the prime of life—go in and give it him, just as I should when I was your age."

"Yes; come on, give it him!" exclaimed Doctor John, doubling up his fist and giving Reuben one in the eye. "Now then, out of my way, podgy," and he dealt Grainger a blow on the nose that sent him reeling. Then he picked up his coat, tied his own horse behind the vehicle, closed the carriage door,

sprang on to the seat, took hold of the reins, and drove away, exclaiming as he did so :

“I’ll pick up that coachman chap of yours as I go along, and send him back with the carriage. Much obliged to yur for lendin’ it. Good-bye !”

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN THE MINISTER'S STUDY

KATE VENNER had returned to her home at Norencester. She had been paid a month's wages in advance, and told that her services would be no longer required. Mr. Grainger had said nothing as to why Maggie had left, and nothing of the encounter with Doctor John in the lane near Burstone.

Ernest Venner, his mother, and sisters were seated at breakfast, and the former had just received a letter which he read with great pleasure, and handed for the perusal of his mother, Kate, and Lilian.

It was a letter from the senior deacon of Zion Chapel, and it announced that the Church had decided to increase his salary by one hundred pounds a year.

"They ought to do double," said Mrs. Venner. "Why should saving souls be such poor work as regards pay?"

"I have not petitioned for it, and coming unasked for, it is doubly welcome," was the reply of her son.

"Bravo, Ernest!" exclaimed Kate. "I like to hear of your getting on." Then she added: "Not a single blessed crib is there advertised this morning," and she laid down the paper. "I shall have to go as

a wretched governess. I can't stay here and sponge on Ernest ; but I do prefer to be a lady's companion, if I can get it. I know I should beat the brats through their A B C rather than teach them. I was happy at The Mansion. I can't think why Maggie ran away like that ; she *was* a flat. I wonder how she likes poverty. I don't. I shouldn't make a good poor man's wife, I know."

"I hope you will never have to be one," exclaimed Mrs. Venner.

"I don't think Maggie would care about being a poor man's wife either," said Kate, with a sly look at her brother.

"Oh, yes, she would, if she loved him," remarked Lilian.

"What a sentimental girl you are," said Kate. "I thought at one time Ernest was sweet on Maggie. Didn't you, mother?"

"Sweet on Maggie! What an expression to use," remarked Mrs. Venner. "Anyone would think your brother was the baker."

"Instead of the Rev. Ernest Venner," exclaimed Kate, in pompous tones. "What is the difference? One sells the material bread, the other dispenses the spiritual."

"Don't joke about such matters," said Ernest Venner. "It is unworthy the sister of a minister."

"Ah, well," said Kate, "you are a good old stick, and I am proud of you. But I say, Ernest, you were gone that way just a little now, eh?" and Kate gave him a dig in the ribs with her finger.

"She was too far above me to dare dream of," said Ernest.

"But she is not now, you know," said Kate.

"I think Ernest has dismissed Miss Sturge from his thoughts as being unsuitable," said Mrs. Venner. "A little social position before marriage is so necessary in a minister's wife. It enables her to keep her position. She must be above the level of all the deacons' wives in birth, in education, and if possible, in wealth. If she lacks either of these, it is quite impossible for her to keep her position as first lady in the church."

"Do you think so, mother?"

"Yes, Ernest," said Mrs. Venner; "I am sure it is so."

But that was a matter that seemed to Ernest too insignificant to notice. God had sent a great hope, a great joy, into his life; far too great to be in any way lessened by such trivial thoughts as had crossed his mother's mind. He did not reply to her, but went out of the room to his study. He literally leapt upstairs like a young schoolboy, and closed the door, to be alone and enjoy to the full his happy thoughts. What need now to have preached the sad sermon of renunciation? Life was not all Lent, it had its Easter too; and surely it was Easter now with him, an Easter of resuscitated Hope, that he had buried at the command of Duty. Into his life God had again sent Love, and made it possible for him to grasp it. It was thus he thought, and so with lowered eyes and bended head he poured out his thanks to the Giver. He had come to the study to finish his sermon, and now took up to read what he had written in order to refresh his mind with the thread of his discourse. He had taken as his text

"The wages of sin is death," and it was written to please one of the deacons, a Mr. Thomas Stonehurst. This gentleman had said to him: "A cheering sort of sermon is all very well, you know, but it ain't what I call sound doctrine. Preaching that God is Love, you know, will never frighten sinners."

"It will touch their hearts, which is better," said Ernest.

"Of some, perhaps," returned Stonehurst, "but not many. People must be preached at sometimes. We ain't had an eternal wrath sermon since you've been here. I have been listening and hoping for it to come, but it hasn't. And now I think, for the good of the cause, it is time we had one. You will find that the hymns on this paper go well with the sermon." Then he added, with a touch of satire: "I hope you won't find it necessary to change them at the last moment as you did once."

Mr. Stonehurst had never quite forgiven Ernest for depriving him of the right to choose the hymns used in the services. Prior to the coming of the new pastor they were chosen by the deacons, which often meant that generally Mr. Stonehurst did it. He also read them out to the congregation, a verse at a time. The hymns thus chosen were often quite out of harmony with the sermon. One beautiful, bright spring morning, in the earlier days of his pastorate, Ernest had chosen as his text, "He made them to be glad," and intended to preach a sermon full of joyfulness that seemed to overwhelm his own heart. To his great consternation, he heard Mr. Stonehurst say, "We will sing hymn 2," and then read out:

"My thoughts on awful subjects roll,
Damnation and the dead." ¹

Ernest Venner waited till Mr. Stonehurst had finished the verse, then he leaned over the front of the pulpit and said :

"Will my dear friend excuse me if I alter the hymn? I don't feel I can sing that this joyous morning; nor is it the feeling of most who are here, but one, I am sure, of thankfulness to the Giver of this beautiful day. Let us sing number 682—

"Come let us join our cheerful songs
With angels round the throne,
Ten thousand, thousand are their tongues,
But all their joys are one."

Very reluctantly Ernest had promised to preach the desired doctrinal sermon. He now took up his half-completed notes and read them. But how out of harmony with his feeling seemed this gloomy essay! Acting on the impulse of the moment, he tore it into shreds, and dropped it into the waste-paper basket by his side. He *could not* preach that *now*. "No, no," he thought, "let this be the text, let this be the strain, 'Rejoice, and again I say rejoice.'" What was written in the glad sunshine? What were the birds singing? What was beating in his own heart? Not "The wages of sin is death," but "Rejoice, and again I say rejoice."

He got some more paper to rewrite his sermon, and he took as his text: "The Lord made them to rejoice." When he had written a few pages, he threw

¹ From Dr. Watts' Psalms and Hymns.

down his pen, and decided he would go for a walk in the country. The morning seemed too beautiful; the air too sweet to be indoors. Why not walk to Burstone and see Maggie? Perhaps, if an opportunity favoured, he would even dare ask her to be his wife. His pulse beat quicker at the thought. He cleared his paper from the table into a neat little heap, and then looked round for stick and hat. While he was so doing, there was a knock at the door. It was the little maid-of-all-work to tell him that Doctor John of Burstone had called to see him.

"Show him up, please," said Ernest.

Hope and joy seemed everywhere this morning, they were visible in Doctor John's bright eyes.

"I don't suppose you will ever guess my errand," he said. "I am the happiest dog alive. If anyone had said to me a month ago that I was going to be married, I should have told them it would be just as likely as I were a-goin' on a voyage to the moon. Well, here I am, and I want you to marry me."

"Let me congratulate you," said Ernest, with hearty sincerity. "I am truly glad to hear it."

"I've taken a business at Norencester, and I am going to add mine to it. The two together will make a nice income for Maggie."

"What Maggie?" asked Ernest, in tones of alarm.

"Why, my Maggie, the prettiest, daintiest, tenderest girl in the county—nay, there ain't her equal in the whole world. There—" but he stopped in his speech, for Ernest had turned suddenly pale and dropped into a chair. "Why, what is the matter?" said John. "Are you not well? You look faint."

"I am all right, thank you," said Ernest, with an effort to recover himself.

"But you are not all right," said John, "far from it; look at your lips, they are bloodless."

"Please open the window," said Ernest.

"Certainly," answered John, and he raised it slightly, saying, as he did so: "You don't look strong, you are overworked. I always thought them sermons must take it out of you, but I had no idea you were as weak as this."

"I shall be better in a minute, thank you," returned Ernest.

"I hope so," answered John cheerfully; "but I should see a doctor, if I was you. You want a change. That's what you want."

"Perhaps I do," answered Ernest. Then he asked, with a great effort: "When is the marriage to be?"

"Next month. Would Thursday fortnight suit you?"

"Yes," answered Ernest.

"At eleven o'clock, shall we say?"

"At eleven, thank you," was the answer.

"Well, I won't keep you any longer. You are looking a little better already. I should go and get some air if I were you. Have a glass of weak brandy before you go."

"I am all right," answered Ernest, with a great effort to smile, "and I congratulate you on—on your marriage."

"Thank you," said John. "I am the happiest varmint alive—good-bye! Now don't come down stairs, sit a few minutes by the open window. I can

let myself out all right," but Ernest followed him to the door.

As John was going out, he met Lilian coming in.

"Give your brother some weak brandy," said John at once; "he has been faint. Make him eat a biscuit, and—and don't let him study so hard. Make him see a doctor too. Good-bye!"

"What is the matter, Ernest?" said Lilian, with an alarmed voice, as she entered the study.

"Nothing, dear—oh, nothing!" he replied.

"But it is something. You are not looking yourself, and a quarter of an hour ago you looked so well. What did Doctor John want?"

"He has asked me to marry him."

"To whom? I shall come and see the wedding. Now be sure you don't forget to congratulate the bride. You know you are absent-minded sometimes. But who is it?"

"Maggie Sturge."

"Oh, Ernest! I am sorry. You will feel it so, and how unkind of us to tease you."

"I shall get over it in time," answered Ernest, and he went up to his study.

How dull, how dingy it looked now, and yet the sun was shining as before.

He sat at the table thinking of his blighted hopes. How quickly the cruel frost had nipped them.

Presently the door was opened, and Lilian entered with the brandy and a few biscuits.

"It is good of you," said Ernest. "God has not taken all away when he has left me so kind a sister."

"Must *you* marry them?" asked Lilian. "It is hard."

"I must," answered Ernest. "What excuse can I make?"

"But I think Maggie might have spared you this. She must have known."

"How should she?" returned Ernest.

"I think I should know if I were loved," said Lilian quietly.

"I hope you will be one day," replied Ernest, "and by someone worthy of you."

Lilian could think of nothing to say just then to comfort him, so she just kissed him, and went away. Ernest drank the spirit; then going to the corner of the room, knelt down and picked from the waste-paper basket the fragments of the torn sermon.

CHAPTER XXIX

JOHN DISCOVERS THE TRUTH

JOHN bought the veterinary business at Norencester, and I helped him to move there. He did not intend to take much furniture with him, saying he would leave the greater part of that for Sarah's use. She would need it, as in the neighbourhood of Burstone there were good fishing and boating, and John thought Sarah would be able to let rooms in the cottage during the summer, and thus, with the assistance of the off-license, she could earn her own living. He would buy new furniture for his house at Norencester, so we had to move only the contents of his drug shop, together with a few drawers and fixtures. I was busy at work with screw-driver and hammer when John, who was emptying the contents of a drawer that had been seldom gone to, said wonderingly :

"What's in this parcel, Phil? It don't feel like pills or drugs of any kind. It's too firm like," he added, weighing it in his hand. Then he exclaimed suddenly: "I know. I had forgotten all about it. Why, it's old Sturge's Bible, that he asked me to take care on when he died, and give it to Maggie when she be growed a woman—and she be growed a woman now, and a fine gal too—God bless her!—and here, I've been and forgotten all about it."

John took it to her, and then came back to me, and we went on with our work. In a little while Maggie came to us with the open Bible in her hand, exclaiming, in excited tones: "John! John! Look here." On a blank page at the end of the book was written the following:

"DEAR MAGGIE,—When you grow up a woman you ought to know of something that has never been talked of by me, though the whole village thought they knew all about it. Your mother *was* married a year before you were born. She left here and went into service, and married a cousin, George Sturge, who was a sailor. As soon as you were born, your father was put into prison. He got fourteen years for manslaughter, and died in prison. Just before he died, they found he did not do it at all, and they gave him a free pardon for what he didn't do. But the pardon only reached him a few days before he died. He was nine years in prison. I never spoke about his being there in the village, so I never spoke about the pardon. They would not have believed me if I had.—Your affectionate grandfather,

"BENJAMIN STURGE."

When John read this, he said:

"I am very glad, little mate—not that it would have made any difference to my loving you—but for your sake, I am glad. Well, we are making a wreck of this place," he added; "it's all going into the shop at the new home," and he lingered with fondness, I thought, on the last two words.

As I looked at Maggie, I thought I saw her shudder.

"You are cold," said John; "you shiver."

"No," answered Maggie, with an effort to smile; "I am all right. Someone walking over my grave—that is all."

John said nothing for a minute or two; but, all of a sudden, just as if the thought had then occurred to him, he placed his hands on Maggie's shoulder, and looking her full in the face, said:

"Little mate, you are free."

I saw an expression of joy on Maggie's face, but it fled in an instant.

"No," she answered; "you took me before, take me now."

John folded her tenderly in his arms and kissed her. He had loved her as a child before. He loved her as a woman now.

Speaking to me a few days afterwards, John said:

"What an extraordinary mistake for Grainger to make! You see, he thought Maggie was his illegitimate child. I wonder if he had anything to do with Ben Sturge's other daughter? She that was away for years, and come home and took poison. Her name was Maggie. She had a child what died."

The next day, as we three were standing in the best room of the cottage (we used this room now because, as John said, the other room was "too small for four grown-ups"), John said gaily:

"Oh, Maggie, I called on Mr. Venner to-day and asked him to marry us."

I saw Maggie start, and then she grew white.

"Why," said John, "what's the matter? There

must be something in the air! You look as white as he did when I asked him to marry us. He's not over-strong, and you ain't either, little mate, but I'll soon get you well when we go to the new home. I'm going to buy a cart to put my mare into, and I'll take you for some fine drives."

"John," said Maggie presently, "could we be married at church?"

"Yes, if you wish," answered John; "but what will Mr. Venner think of me? You don't dislike him, do you, Maggie?"

"Oh, no," answered Maggie.

"Then why is it, little mate? I don't mind where it is as long as there is not a lot of fuss. I like things quiet. Of course, I like Mr. Venner very much, and that is more than I can say of all parsons. Still, if you much wish it to be at church, I will go and tell him so. I am afraid he will think it strange, bein', as you have been, there sometimes, and I've been there, and as his sister was your companion. It's only natural like as he should marry us. Still, I will tell him."

"No; please don't," said Maggie, speaking with some emotion, far more than I had seen in her since her return. "I will be married in Zion Chapel—*and by him,*" she added, speaking slowly, and I thought with an effort.

I remember the wedding so well. For some days John had been working at the new home in North Street, Norencester, to get everything in order. It was almost pathetic to see the pride he took in it, and the care and pains he bestowed upon it that his

"little mate" might find in it everything she needed for her comfort.

"Phil," he said, "what a happy home this will be for me. I am the merriest dog alive."

For several nights before the wedding, John and I had been sleeping at Norencester. On the wedding morning, John sent a carriage to Burstone for Maggie and Sarah. John and I walked to the chapel. We expected to find it empty ; but, to my surprise, there were a number of people there. It had leaked out when it would be, I think, through Sarah ; and as Doctor John was so well known and so much liked, there were many of the poorer class there to witness the ceremony. Others, I think, attended out of curiosity to see what Maggie was like. The report of her adoption by the wealthy Mr. Grainger, and of her ultimately leaving him, had caused no little excitement in Norencester and its surroundings.

I can recall the marriage vividly. I have a memory of John, smarter in dress than usual, and looking perhaps a little awkward in his new clothes ; of Sarah, grim and austere ; of Lilian Venner, calm and beautiful, watching all with sympathetic eyes ; of Ernest Venner, pale and unusually nervous ; of Maggie, still paler, and making her responses in a voice so low as to be hardly audible ; of John, leading her to the vestry ; of Maggie, signing her name in a trembling hand, then making a faint cry, and falling backwards into the strong arms of John ; of the women all pressing round her, and John pushing them back, and saying : "Give her air ; open the window, somebody ;" of them applying smelling salts and other restoratives, and of Maggie

slowly coming back to consciousness, and saying: "Where am I, John?"; of her resting some time before they left the chapel; and of John—oh, how altered his face was now!—saying to me: "I shall drive to the house now, Phil—not the station; meet me there."

All this I see now as vividly as though it occurred but yesterday, and I can hear, too, John's heart-broken speech as I entered the house:

"I would have given my life to have known an hour ago what I know now."

So saying, he took me by the arm, and led the way into his dispensary.

"What is the matter?" I said. "You look so white and ill."

Poor fellow! how haggard his face looked! What fearful pain was written there!

"I have made a terrible mistake, Phil," he said. "One as I can never undo."

"What?" I asked, not knowing what to say.

The dreaded truth that I had feared some weeks was plainly written on John's face.

"She loves Ernest Venner," he said quietly—no anger, no scorn in his voice; but great sorrow—more for her, I thought, than himself.

"You may be mistaken," I said. "And Maggie will make you a faithful, obedient wife."

I did not say *loving*; I could not lie to him then.

"Poor girl!" he said, "and I wanted to make her happy."

What could I say to him of comfort or hope? *Nothing!*

He sat there for some time, his arm resting on his

knee, his head buried in his hand. The strong man seemed broken with remorse and grief.

At length I said to him :

"She will forget him in time; she will be loyal to you. She cannot help her thoughts, and you must forgive her."

"Forgive!" he said. "It's her to forgive—not me! How blind I have been. Why, it was written in her face when I told her as I had asked him to marry us!"

While we were talking, there was a knock at the door. It was Maggie, who, entering the room, said :

"May I come in? I feel better now, and am ready to go away with you, John."

"I am glad you are better, my dear," said John. "Sit down one moment, and hear what I have been tellin' Phil. I have made a terrible mistake. I only wanted to make you happy, and now I have spoilt your life. Is it not so? Tell me truly. Don't you love Ernest Venner?"

John spoke to her in a voice free from any touch of anger or scorn. There was just a passionate pleading for the truth; that was all.

Maggie said nothing in reply. I saw that she trembled, that she moved her lips as though to speak, and that they refused to make utterance.

"Just one word, little mate," said John. "Tell me the truth—the whole truth."

I saw Maggie draw a deep breath, and that her bosom heaved. Then she said "Yes," and hid her face in her hands.

"Oh, my dear, why didn't you tell me this

T

yesterday? I would have set you free. I would now, but I cannot."

I saw Maggie get up and throw herself on the ground at John's feet. I saw her clasp John's hand, and hold it to her lips, and I heard her say in broken sobs: "Oh, forgive me, John! I will be a faithful wife. I will forget him. I will love you. I will try; I will try."

John tenderly lifted her from the ground, and placed her on the sofa.

"Make up the fire, will you, Phil," said he, "Maggie is cold." Then he went into another room, and came back with a rug and covered her with it.

"Lie here a little while," he said. "I don't know what is best to do for you. We won't go away now. I must think it all over. I will come back to you soon."

I followed him to the door and asked him where he was going.

"I don't know," he said absently. "I don't know."

With that he slowly walked out of the house.

It was necessary for me to go to the Foundry that afternoon, as I had only obtained leave of absence for the morning. I thought John would have been in to dinner, but he did not come. There was a maid-servant in the house John had engaged for Maggie, and she, on my telling her, put some dinner on the table. But Maggie could not eat anything. I ate but little, and hurried off to the Foundry. On my return, I found that John had not come back, so I thought it best to go and look for him. I walked all over Norencester, and then I went to Burstone, but without finding him.

At length I returned late in the evening. As I entered the room, I found Maggie kneeling on the floor, and the tears were streaming from her face. On the ground, lying at full length, was John. He was quite drunk, and fast asleep. I noticed that Maggie had covered him with a rug, and raised his head on a pillow.

"He came in a few minutes ago," said Maggie. "He didn't even know me. He reeled to the floor where he now is. Oh, Phil, what shall I do, what shall I-do?"

My answer in the face of such a tragedy must have sounded like bathos; but it was practical, and the only thing to do. I told her to go to bed, and that I would sleep on the sofa beside him. I knew from experience as a boy that the only thing to do was to let him sleep it off; and that he would be quite sober in the morning.

"But it is I," said Maggie, "who have brought him to this. He would never have taken to it again if he had not married me."

What could I say to comfort her? This was partly true. I am quite sure now John never would have gone back to drink again had not some great sorrow such as this shadowed his life.

It was a bitter cold night. I covered him with more rugs, and then, making up the fire, slept on the sofa beside him—a fitful, broken sleep. Memories of my childhood came crowding upon me, in which John, fighting against his terrible vice, was ever the central figure.

As I lay awake I thought how often he had let my childish hand lead him from temptation. Could the

stronger hand of the woman he had now married hold him as firmly as the frail fingers of the child?

In the morning, John was quite sober and quiet. That he was stricken with remorse I could see, although he said to Maggie only these words: "And this on your wedding-day!"

After breakfast, or a pretence of one, he called me into his drug-room, and said:

"I have been thinking it all over, Phil. I have slipped right down to the bottom rung of the ladder, and I don't feel as I could ever climb any more. I have injured her I hoped to make happy."

"You will make her happy yet," I said, throwing as much comfort as I could into my voice, "and you will never injure her so much as you will do if she sees and feels she has driven you to what happened last night. For her, for mine, for your own sake, fight against it still, and you will conquer as you did years ago."

"I will try," he said sadly. "Don't think that I don't feel, or I am not sensible of what a beast I was last night. I will try; but, it is hard work now. But I want to speak to you about what I have made out in my mind about Maggie. She and I will live here now as brother and sister, and you with us, Phil. She can do that here without any slander coming across her sweet name. God bless her!"

CHAPTER XXX

THE ANGEL OF THE FOUNDRY

IT is two years since I took my gloomy ride in the undertaker's dog-cart. I find I am in love again : but this time in a very different way. It has not come upon me suddenly, causing me to do foolish things ; its growth has been as gradual as friendship, and in that it first took its rise. The whole of my life has been influenced by one woman, and influenced strongly for good. It is almost desecration to speak of being in love with Her ; she seems as much above our earthly passions as a saint in a shrine. She is a woman to be worshipped with reverence, but not to be loved unless, indeed, the love be of the purest, and has been refined in the furnace of pain or sorrow.

For two years I have seen her frequently. She is in very truth what the rough men of our large works call her, the "Angel of the Foundry." She is Lilian, sister to Ernest Venner.

How has she gained that title ? Let me acquaint the reader. Ernest Venner still speaks at the Foundry once a week, and for the last three years he has brought his sister with him. She stands by his side like a guardian angel, while he is speaking. Not that he needs one now, for ever since John turned the tide of public opinion in his favour, he has always

been listened to with courteous attention. But it is not this which has gained her the title, but something far more angelic, if that word may convey all that is purest, most beautiful, and compassionate in woman. It is after her brother's brief address is finished, and the men have begun their work, that Lilian justifies her title. She then visits the wives and sisters of the men in their homes ; that is, those who are in sorrow or distress. To meet any special misfortune, such as a lengthy illness, or the death of the bread-winner—and, alas! there are plenty of these cases—she collects money partly from the town, partly from the firm, and, as far as she can, from the men themselves. She moves among them with perfect freedom, going with her little bag from workshop to workshop. She was not more than sixteen when she first began her mission. The men all love her and worship her for her sweet charity, and it would go hard with any man who said a coarse or insulting word to the Angel of the Foundry.

Now and again she comes to me in the office, and says : “ Mr. Ditch, have you heard of any fresh cases needing aid ? ” But it is not often, for the men soon tell her, and seek her help.

In cases, or in times, when there is exceptional distress among the men, she will come into my office and ask for Mr. Strenbury personally.

I point with a smile to the notice on the wall : “ *Friend, despatch thy business and depart.* ”

I then go and tell Mr. Strenbury, who has never yet refused to see her, and he says : “ My maid, what wilt thou that I should give thee ? Wilt thee be able to meet thy wants if I give thee five pounds ? ”

Lilian says "Yes," and smiles and thanks him, whereupon Mr. Strenbury says: "Mr. Ditch, wilt thee take Miss Venner to the cashier, and request him to give her five pounds for sweet Charity's sake?"

As she moves about among the men at the Foundry, there is not one who does not soften his rude speech as she approaches, for young as she is, in her three years' work among them she has so often stood beside the sick, and sometimes beside the dying.

I was at work one day in the Foundry turning over one of its ponderous ledgers, when, looking up, I saw Lilian's sweet face before me.

"Mr. Ditch," said she, "would you help me in a little matter? There is a woman lodging with one of the Foundry men, and she has been much in arrear with her rent. Now she has given them a cheque for five pounds, which she wants changed. I know nothing about money matters, nor do they."

"Let me see the cheque," said I. "And then I can tell you, perhaps."

Lilian showed it to me. It was drawn on a Sheffield bank, and signed "James Grainger."

"That's not the Grainger of this town," said I, "and it is never advisable to cash cheques one knows nothing about. I will go and ask the cashier's advice."

With that remark I offered her a seat, and left her. Then I found the cashier in his office and showed him the cheque.

"Is that good?" I asked him.

"I don't know," he answered. "James Grainger, drawn on a Sheffield bank, eh? Now, I wonder,"

said he, "if that is the minister of the Independent Chapel of that town? That certainly is his name. I heard him when I was there last year staying at my brother's, and a mealy-mouthed, long-winded fellow he was, too."

"I suppose he is no relation to the Grainger of this town?" I asked.

"I have heard they are brothers," returned the cashier; "but there is not much likeness between them in person or in character. The only thing for me to do," continued the cashier, "is to pay it in to the bank here. I will do it, if you like, to my own account—can't mix it up with the firm's money, of course—and then wait four clear days and see if it is cashed or dishonoured."

I thanked him, and going back to Lilian, told her.

"If you like," I said, "I will take the cheque to Grainger's, and ask him if it is his brother's signature. It would save delay."

"That would be kind of you," said Lilian.

I went with pleasure, being very anxious to oblige her. I had some difficulty in obtaining access to the great man, and first saw a junior clerk, who referred me to Mr. Starkham, evidently the man whom Mrs. Starkham had spoken of as "my Reuben."

"From Strenbury's, you say you are?" said Mr. Starkham. "Well, I will ascertain if Mr. Grainger will see you."

Presently I heard from an inner office a gruff voice saying: "Show the man in."

I went in, and presenting the cheque to Mr.

Grainger, asked if he knew the signature. "Was it his brother's?" I inquired.

"I am sure I don't know. Never heard or seen him for a great many years. James is a fool. He married money. Not much compared to the pile which I have made myself—but he chucks it away by building a church. He goes his way in life, I go mine. Good day!"

I had not done any good by this visit, and as I was very anxious to do anything for Lilian, I decided to call on the woman and ask a few questions. Before I left the office I had taken note of the address from Lilian. I found the house in a little dingy street near the river; it was in the most squalid part of Norencester, and I wondered how Lilian dare venture there alone.

I made my business known to the occupant of the house, and found that her lodger was upstairs. Accordingly, I went up and knocked at the door. As I did so, a voice called out, in answer to my summons: "Come in."

I saw a cold, stony, yet haggard face. It seemed familiar to me. Where had I seen it before?

"I have come about the cheque," I said.

"Well, what about it?"

"Your landlady can't change it."

"Why not?"

"No one here knows anything about the drawer."

"That's good enough," said the woman. "I wish it was fifty pounds instead. And him spending so much on a church, and so little on his wife. It's downright wicked, ain't it?"

"You are his wife?" I asked.

"Yes ; what's that to do with you, though ?"

"Oh, nothing. Only, if I am going to get the cheque changed, I must know all about it."

"Well, I have one every month. Now then, give us the money. I am dying for a drink."

"Who is this James Grainger ?" I asked.

"Jim is my husband—and a beauty he is, too. Didn't he give me the slip twice, and didn't I find him both times ?"

"Yes," I said ; "but who is he, and what is he ?"

"He is a parson, he is. You should hear him preach, you would think him a saint. A near squeak for him of bigamy—thought I was dead. Did he ever stop to inquire ? Never mind, I get something for keeping quiet."

Although the woman was in arrear with her rent, it was evident she had found the money for drink. I could tell this by her excited manner, and the smell in the room.

"I think I can get it changed for you," I said, for I now believed her story, but I was minded to be cautious, so I asked her one or two further questions.

"This cheque," I said, "is payable to Mrs. Watts, and you now say your name is Grainger."

"So it is ; he likes to change my name, like he changed his own. Don't you see, he is in society now ; it would never do for it to be known that I am his wife ? I don't look much of a swell, do I ? So I am Mrs. Watts."

"What names has he had besides his own ?" said I, cross-examining her like a counsel for the defence.

"Luke Shepherd," said she.

"Luke Shepherd!" I repeated, in astonishment. "Why, that man lived at Norencester fifteen years or so ago."

"Who said he didn't?" said the woman. "That was the name he took when he cleared out with his cart, and left me and the baby; but I found him out. I always will."

"Luke Shepherd was never married," said I, "until he went north. He lived several years at Norencester."

"He was married to me," said the woman fiercely, "and courted the sister of that horse doctor fellow that I gave my baby to. Wish I hadn't now."

I turned away, sick at heart. I kept my face from the woman; lest she should see what was written there.

"Then you were married before—I—before this child was born?"

"Of course I was; but why should I keep the baby when he had left it? I expect he has grown a fine lad now. I shall ask that Doctor where he is. That's why I have come to Norencester. I may get something out of my son. But you seem wonderfully interested in my story—enough to give me the price of a drink, eh?"

Without looking at her, I placed a few shillings on the table and hurried down the stairs.

When I returned to the Foundry, I asked the cashier to change the cheque for me, saying I would be responsible for it. I then sent the cash on by one of the office lads.

A few days after this occurrence, as I was glancing over the *Norencester Mercury*, I saw a short paragraph,

"Death from Alcoholic Poisoning." I read it, and found it to be that of "Mrs. Watts, a stranger to this town, lodging at 44 Dank Street." It was the woman I had changed the cheque for—my own mother!

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It was a few months after John's marriage that a letter came for Maggie. It had been addressed to her at Burstone, and was forwarded by Sarah.

"It is from Mr. Nettleby," said Maggie, glancing at the signature.

"I suppose," said John, "to say that Mr. Grainger is dead. I heard of it yesterday. It was very sudden—apoplexy, I think."

The letter was as follows :

"DEAR MADAM,—

"Grainger, deceased.

"I regret to have to acquaint you of the death of my client, Thomas Grainger, Esq., of The Mansion, Rushmere, and of Grainger, Limited, Norencester. The funeral will be at two o'clock on Saturday, the 10th inst.

"In the absence of relations, the duty has devolved upon me to arrange for the funeral, and I should be glad to know if you wish to be present, in order that I may arrange for conveyances for all who attend. The deceased will be interred in Rushmere Churchyard.—Your obedient servant,

"JAMES NETTLEBY.

"P.S.—I may mention it will be my duty, after the ceremony, to read the will and expound its clauses."

"I much doubt if you are in the will," I observed, as I laid down the letter, which Maggie had given me to read. "If ever you were, your leaving, and that little affair with the carriage, would be sure to have caused an alteration."

"I don't want his money, and I hope I am not mentioned in his will," said Maggie decisively. "I have no respect for him."

"I should imagine," said I, "that that letter is written because Mr. Nettleby imagines some relationship to exist between you, and which your grandfather's letter now disproves. Shall you go to the funeral?" I asked.

"No," answered Maggie, speaking very decisively; so nothing further was said about the matter.

As I was going through the town that morning on my way to the Foundry, I passed Mr. Starkham, the undertaker, who was standing at his door rubbing his hands. He called out to me: "Good morning, Mr. Ditch!" I returned his salutation, and shook hands with him.

"Something like a job we have got this morning. I have got to provide the best of everything, no matter what the expense is. The thing is to be done in tip-top style. That's the way to be buried, Mr. Ditch, it encourages trade. A job like this makes life worth living. And then, I have got the order to find up the best monumental sculptors in London to do the other part of the business. I shall get a commission on that, you know."

"It is for Mr. Grainger," I said, "of course?"

"Rather," said he. "There is no one else in Norencester who could afford it, except, perhaps, old

Zachariah Strenbury, and he is not quite the sort to do it."

I agreed with Mr. Starkham. He was not quite the sort. As I walked away, I thought of all the pomp and display that were to follow, and of the large marble monument that would perpetuate Mr. Grainger's memory. Let the massive slab be chiselled with all the skill of the artist hand, it would never be wet with tears, such as often fall on unknown graves. His epitaph might well have been this :

"Success attended him in all things save success."

On the Monday following Mr. Grainger's funeral, there came another letter from Mr. Nettleby to Maggie. This is what it said :

"DEAR MADAM,—

"Re Grainger, deceased.

"I have the pleasure to inform you that by the will of the above you are made sole legatee. I am appointed executor. I should be glad of an interview with you at such time as may be convenient. Will you kindly make an appointment, either at my office, or I will come to see you if preferred.—
Your obedient servant,

"JAMES NETTLEBY."

"You do not jump for joy, Maggie," I said, as I handed her back the letter.

"Not one little bit, Phil. I should like to give it all to John and to you."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE STORM

I NOW come to an event in my life, so deeply imprinted on my memory that now, after the lapse of many years, I see it still before me as vividly as if it had happened but yesterday. It is so closely interwoven with all I have related ; indeed, it seems to be its dark shadow that I have seen, a long way off, growing bigger and bigger from my childhood.

It was the day before Christmas, and there was to be a social gathering of the Foundry workers and their wives. A large iron shed, in which were stored ploughs and other agricultural implements, had been cleared for this purpose. The gathering was held with the consent of the firm ; but the organisers and chief movers in the matter were Ernest Venner and his sister Lilian. I had been closely at work on my books all day, but not too engrossed to observe that it had been a day of mixed weathers. There had been thunder, lightning, and hail, interspersed with fitful bursts of sunshine, soon followed by driving wind that blew the rain on to the Foundry sheds like sheets of steel. But towards the evening the weather improved, or I think the entertainment would have been postponed. As I was leaving for the night, Mr. Strenbury said to me :

"I hope there will be no damage done in the Foundry to-night. Didst thee observe the sky just before sunset?"

I replied that I had not noticed it.

"It was a mass of cloud like blurred smoke, but so driven into tortuous and weird shapes that I have never seen its like before. There will be wind in the night, if I am not mistaken."

As I walked home I noticed that the wind had risen; it seemed to rumble and moan against the houses. Round the angles of the Cathedral it literally shrieked with a sound that to me was ominous and weird. It started in a low murmur, and then rose to a shrill whistle, dying away in the distance with a long wail like a cry of pain. I found as I walked along that it seemed to blow from all directions, and whichever way I turned it blew with equal violence.

When I reached home I found John there. He was sitting looking at the fire, doubtless seeing therein fancies and faces. So deeply absorbed was he that he did not notice my entrance. I went up to him, and placed my hand on his shoulder. He started as I did so. Of what had he been thinking? Of his own blighted hopes, perhaps, but more possibly of Maggie's.

We had some tea together, and Maggie joined us; but she said little. Indeed, ever since her return from The Mansion she had lost all her gaiety. I tried to cheer her, and spoke now and again a few words of banter, calling her my little grumbling landlady. But she never grumbled. I could have wished that she had. It would have been better than this dull apathy which had settled upon her. Once or twice I

spoke to her about it, and asked her to show some interest in her home, and wear a smile now and again for John's sake.

"I will try, Phil," she said. "I know it is wrong of me. I will try." But who can force cheerfulness or simulate vivacity?

After tea, John seemed restless. He walked up and down the room, then went into the drug store, then upstairs, and again into the room where Maggie and I were sitting. Presently he took up a paper, and tried to read, but soon threw it down, and stood looking out of the window.

"Why are you so restless?" I asked.

"I don't know, I am sure. Do you hear the wind? There will be wrecks at sea to-night," he said.

He went to the window again, and looked out upon the dark and almost deserted street.

"I must go out," he said.

"It is raining," I exclaimed.

"I can't help it," he answered, almost irritably. "I must go out."

I was apprehensive of something—I knew not what; so I resolved to go out with him.

"I don't want to drag you out in the wet," he said.

"I shall go with you," I answered, for I feared the old degrading passion had returned to him; and yet it seemed something more than that I dreaded. So long as I was with him, John would never give way to drink, I knew, and keep with him to-night I *would*. What, then, did I dread? I could not say.

As we walked along, he exclaimed:

"I fare to have got the miserables to-night. I—" but he did not finish the sentence. A gust of wind

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tore along the street. I was blown into a doorway, where I had to remain for several moments. John, strong man as he was, was carried some yards along the pavement, and he had to turn round and bend his body and duck his head, to prevent being blown over. But having to battle with the rude forces of Nature braced his spirits, for he said, with something of his old laugh :

"Well, if that ain't enough to blow the miserables out of anyone, I don't know what is. The wind is like me, it's rough and ready—a little too ready just then. Not much of the 'by your leave—beg pardon' about that wind. It was a rough 'un, wasn't it, Phil? Here, you come and claw hold of me, and we will get along together."

We walked a few minutes in silence. Then he said :

"There is something on at the Foundry to-night, I have heard."

"Yes," I answered.

"Why didn't you go?" he asked of me.

"I thought I would stay at home to keep you company."

"Thanks, mate, thanks! But let's go there together; 'taint all over yet, I don't suppose."

"Not half-way through yet, I should think," I answered.

"I like Mr. Venner," said John. "I allus did, I allus shall. What's happened will make no difference. It ain't his fault. He could not help it more than I could. How our two lives have run into one another like." Then he added solemnly, speaking not to me, but to himself: "*Where will it end?*"

The only answer was made by the wind, as it rushed by us, and met at the angle of the street another gust of storm-driven air. That answer was a loud, shrill scream that made me turn cold and shiver as I listened to it. I was almost blown to the ground, and had to cling to John for support. We both waited a few minutes to gain breath, and sought cover in a sheltering doorway. When we resumed our journey we walked almost sideways to present less surface for the hurricane to blow against, and we kept crossing and recrossing the path like a sailing boat tacking against a head-wind. Thus, by dint of many stoppages, and much manœuvring to dodge the wind, we reached the Foundry gates. The smaller one was open, and as I passed through it I had to cling to it for security, for another volume of wind threw us with great force against it, lifting me from the ground and dashing me against the railings. At that instant I heard the sound of a great crash, followed by another, and then another. I heard shrieks of women, screams of children, and cries of men in pain.

John and I ran forward, and saw before us almost the entire shed blown down, its iron roof crushing the poor creatures beneath it. As we reached the building we found that some had escaped unhurt, and were now running away in maddened fright, while others were trying to extricate the helpless forms under the broken wood and sheets of iron that buried them. Here the wreckage was almost flat with the ground, while there it was driven by the force of the wind, and piled up in great heaps. To remove the sufferers from the former was much easier

than the latter. I soon lost sight of John. He had snatched up a crow-bar from somewhere, and was raising a sheet of iron here, or a rafter there, as he dragged some poor wretch from beneath the *débris*.

Looking around me I saw, by the fitful light of the moon, that there were many injured and several dead. The catastrophe might have been worse if fire had ensued, but fortunately, all the gas-jets which lighted the building went out directly the crash came. A sheet of iron had fallen on the main lead pipe and severed it.

As I was standing there, I could see that the end portion of the building was not blown down, but swayed to and fro in the wind. We could hear those inside screaming for help, but we were unable to get to them. The wind had piled up the wreckage against the open end of the shed, making a wide barrier several yards in height and width. Chairs, forms, wooden beams, and large sheets of corrugated iron—a mass of wreckage—were heaped up in dire confusion; and intermixed with or underneath all this *débris* were human beings. Once I saw John go down on all fours, and put his back under a large sheet of iron. I saw him raise it, and then I heard him calling to me to drag someone from beneath it. I did so, and found it was Lilian, frightened, but not hurt, and then I heard John say:

"I have heard *him*. He is there," pointing several yards ahead.

John called to some men around him: "Lend us a hand, mates, he is under that heap of iron. We can't lift it. We must crawl under it. I heard the parson just now, he's not many yards away."

Some of the men agreed to help him, others declared it was too risky, for any moment the partly wrecked structure might be blown down upon them.

All this time the wind was beating in its wild fury. In the fitful light of the moon, every now and again quite hidden by flying clouds, I could see the structure bending towards us as the wind beat upon it. I went up to John, and begged of him not to endanger his life. He said:

"I must help *him*, Phil. I can't leave him there to be killed at any moment. If the end is to come now, it must come, and if not, I'll wait for it."

Then I heard him call out loudly to Ernest Venner: "I'll reach you soon, sir. I think there is a way."

I watched him crawl underneath the wreckage. He had to go several yards before he could reach the man he sought to liberate, and I waited in almost breathless suspense for his return. Meanwhile, some were making an attempt to effect an opening in one of the walls, and thus liberate those shut within the building. But it failed, as it was found that the iron sheets were all firmly bolted on the inside with screws and nuts. Presently—it was perhaps after a few minutes only, but the time seemed hours—someone was dragged from underneath the *débris*. It was a woman; she had been passed on by John and the few brave men who followed him. We thought at first she had merely fainted, but it was found afterwards that she was dead. She had been crushed by the falling iron. The next that was pulled out I saw to be a man.

It was Ernest Venner, and he was found to be slightly injured, but not seriously. His arm had been jammed between two sheets of iron, and John had released him by prising them apart with the crow-bar that he carried with him.

I now went forward, calling out loudly to him, and begging him to come back. For I felt that surely he had done his part that night. But I heard him say: "Not yet; there are some more poor varmints—" The remainder of the words I did not hear. They were lost in the roar of the wind that beat suddenly upon us. I heard a loud crash, and saw that the remainder of the iron building was swept down as if it had been a house built with playing-cards.

For some minutes we could none of us do anything to render assistance. We could only with difficulty keep our feet, and had to wait for the hurricane to slacken its fury. When at length it abated, we set to work. I think we all did so now, as the entire building having been blown down, there was far less danger. With several men, I made efforts to get to John. We called to him, but he did not answer. We were soon joined by others, armed with crow-bars and ropes, while some had fetched a portable hand-crane, with which to lift anything that stood in the way. After a long time, John was reached and brought out. He was unconscious, but not dead. By this time several doctors had been summoned, and they were in the Foundry offices giving aid to the injured as they were taken in. John was carried there and examined by two doctors. They told me he was seriously injured, and they feared little could

be done for him. He might die any moment, or he might linger on for a few hours.

I thought it best for him to be taken home, so I quickly made all arrangements for him to be carried there, giving him every care that was possible. We procured a cart, and placed straw at the bottom of it. He was gently laid on it, and I knelt beside him as we went slowly through the dark streets. On nearing his home, he opened his eyes and asked me where he was. Then he placed his hand on his chest and uttered a low cry of pain.

Ernest Venner had stood by me while John was being examined; I had begged him to go on first and break the sad news to Maggie, and he said that he would do so. As I rode back beside my dear, dying friend, my heart was full of bitter thoughts of Maggie. How would she receive the news that Ernest Venner had gone to break to her? Indeed, would the news require any breaking? I had a presentiment that Maggie, in her heart of hearts, would be glad to be released from a marriage which seemed to have cast such a shadow on her life. I felt when I saw her that some taunting speech would be sure to come to my lips, and that I should be quite unable to repress it. On arriving at the house, I found Maggie standing at the open door. There was no trace of any tears on her face, only a hard, strained look. She said to me in a low voice, as I went up to her:

"It is I who have killed him." The bitter, unjust taunt almost sprang to my lips: "Yes; you can have your parson now," but I repressed them as I

looked upon her face, and saw the sorrow and pain written there, and I said only, in terms that were cold and formal : " Such words as those can do no good to him or you."

They brought John in, laid him on the couch, and then left us. Ernest Venner, Maggie, and I sat watching the dying man. For some time he seemed to relapse into unconsciousness, and we neither of us broke the solemn silence by the utterance of a word.

At length John opened his eyes again, and asked for a little water. When this was given him, he said to Maggie : " Will you leave us a few minutes, my dear, I want to speak to Mr. Venner alone."

I was about to leave the room too, when John said :

" No, Phil, don't go away. I would like you to hear what I have to say, and what I wish. The end has come, Phil. No one has told me, but I know it. I can't talk much, I feel so weak. Mr. Venner, come closer." Turning to him, he said : " You love Maggie."

I saw that Ernest Venner started, and turned pale. He made no answer to John, however, and appeared unable to speak out.

" No, don't falter, man, you have been loyal all through ; be open with me now. You cannot help it, nor can she help loving you. I found it all out when it was too late ; and now, when I am gone, I want you to marry her. That is all. Good-bye ! Please leave me and send Maggie back."

And with that he closed his eyes, and seemed to sleep for a while. Presently he said to me : " What is to-day ? "

" Christmas Eve," I said.

" Phil," said John, speaking with much effort,

"there is a cripple at Burstone—you know the one whose crutch I borrowed. I've allus giv'n him five shillin's every Christmas mornin'. He will miss me to-morrow. Send it him, will you? You will find some money in the office drawer."

I promised to do so, and then John slept again for a while. Presently Maggie came into the room and sat by his side, watching him as he slept. When he awoke, he called to me and said: "Tell Maggie what I said to him."

I think it was to spare himself, for the effort to speak was too great for him just then. When I had finished, Maggie went up to him, and placing her arm tenderly under his pillow, said to him:

"John, John! it is you I love now, not him."

John raised himself with a great effort, caught her to his breast, and then fell back on the pillow.

Outside, Nature was at her fiercest, for the storm had not yet ceased. But for John all storm had ended. The tempest of life had passed away, leaving peace behind.

CHAPTER XXXII

CHARITY AND LOVE

WE buried our dead hero in Burstone Churchyard. I called with Ernest Venner on the Rector of Burstone to get his consent for the Nonconformist minister to read over his body the funeral service. The Rector readily gave permission, and then added :

"A grand end to a blighted life. I know his history well, and often felt saddened in the earlier years of my charge of this village by the spectacle he presented."

"Need we speak of that now?" said Ernest Venner quietly. "It may be, in the sight of Heaven, that even his earlier life was not so blighted as it seems to us. With our dim eyes we cannot always see the purposes of the Almighty. Let us remember 'Heaven doth with us, as we with torches do, not light them for themselves.'"

"True, true!" returned the Rector thoughtfully.

"Let him that is without sin cast the first stone," said Ernest Venner to me as we walked away.

And now I turn from the dead to the living. I find it is more than a year since John died, and in that time many things have happened. I have had an interview with Mr. Strenbury, and the result of it is that I have obeyed to the full the injunction hanging on the wall of the outer office. I have

despatched my business and departed, never to return. As we shake hands, Mr. Strenbury says: "Thou takest with thee my wishes for thy welfare."

Why have I left the Foundry? I have done so at Maggie's suggestion. It is to take the helm at the business of Grainger & Co., Ltd.

Maggie owns half the shares of the Company; the other half she has given to me, together with the appointment of Managing Director. Maggie and I live together, not at The Mansion, but in a much smaller house. We have sold the former, and its owner has pulled down the gilded iron railings through which the passer-by could see the whole of the grounds. He has surrounded it with a high brick wall, which ensures that privacy so loved by Englishmen and hated by foreigners.

I have made several changes in the business arrangements of Grainger, Ltd., the first being to dispense with the services of Reuben Starkham; the second, to get a list of all the employés, and a statement of the work they do and the wages they receive. The result of this has been an increase in the wages paid to many of the employés, and the formation of an old age pension fund, something very substantial being at once placed to its credit by the firm for the benefit, in time, of each employé.

The veterinary business at Norencester I sold, and handed the proceeds to Sarah. She had always been much opposed to John's marriage, and when I took her the news of his death, she remarked: "I knew no good would ever come of it. It was bad enough to adopt a bastard; worse still to marry one." I told Sarah of my own discovery, and reminded her

of Sturge's letter. She merely said that she did not believe either the one or the other.

Soon after John's death, Maggie and I moved into a house on the outskirts of Norencester. I thought she was feeling lonely there, so, at my suggestion, she engaged Kate Venner as companion.

At the outset, I found great assistance in conducting the business of Grainger, Ltd., from the sound, practical advice of Mr. Nettleby. He seemed much interested, too, in Maggie, and would sometimes call to see her. I grew to like the grim old lawyer, and so did Kate Venner, although she always referred to him as "Old Six and Eight." But there came a day when Mr. Nettleby asked her to be his wife, and Kate answered "Yes;" but added, with a roguish smile, and a memory of a certain occasion: "Another poor fellow done for!" At least, that is what she told Maggie.

But there was another poor fellow to be done for that year—one in whom I took a greater interest than I did in Mr. Nettleby. That poor fellow was *myself*!

One day I had asked Lilian if she would be my wife, and she had answered: "When a man risks his life to save mine, how can I say no?"

"Oh, no," I answered. "I did nothing; John did all. But is that the only reason why you will be mine?"

"You are most inquisitive," said Lilian, with pretty blush and a soft laugh. "I don't think you ought to ask any more questions."

But I did, and the result was that I married the "Angel of the Foundry."

I now changed my surname, or rather took my real one—*Grainger*. Whether I ever had a Christian name

I did not trouble to inquire. I kept to Philman, in memory of the brave soul who gave it to me.

It was some time after we were married that Lilian said to me: "Do you think Maggie will ever marry?"

"I am sure I don't know," I answered. "She still feels John's death very keenly—far more so than I ever thought she would. Her love was late in coming for him, but it did come at last, thank God! and John died with a smile upon his face. I don't think she will give her hand to another yet."

"Not even to Ernest?" said Lilian. "He loves her now, and Doctor John wished it. I want to make two lives happy."

"You have done so," I answered, with a smile.

"Two more lives, then," said Lilian.

I told her that if she wished it I would speak to Maggie upon the subject, and see if it were possible to bring about the union of the two lives she so much wished to see joined. A few days after this I found a favourable opportunity to speak to Maggie. I fear I asked her to marry Mr. Venner in as blunt a manner as I had asked her to marry John. She laid her sisterly hand on my shoulder, and said:

"Phil, you are not getting tired of me?"

"Maggie," I answered, "how can you ask such a question?"

"Let me live with you still, then."

"And you don't love Ernest Venner?" I asked.

"No," was the very firm reply.

"And you won't, of course, marry him, then?"

"No, Phil; I ruined one man's happiness—and I may even have caused his death. I feel now as though

I drove John out that night ; and it was all because I married him without loving him. Would you have me do this again ? ”

“ No,” I answered ; “ but perhaps the love will come some day. You must remember it was John’s dying wish.”

“ When he said that,” returned Maggie, the colour coming to her face, “ he did not know all.”

“ I think he would have said the same if he *had* known *all*,” I answered. “ But we will not say any more about it now. If ever you feel differently, tell me ; but of this you may be sure, if you married Ernest Venner, you would not be married only for your money.”

“ And he loves me,” said Maggie pensively ; “ I know.”

“ He does,” I answered. “ And he was John’s friend. When I was quite a child he influenced him for good ; he gave him sympathy when all around jeered at him ; he helped him to fight against the vice that shadowed his life ; he saved John’s life—his moral life—as truly as John saved him from death at the Foundry.”

“ Don’t say any more, Phil,” said Maggie, “ it cannot be. I don’t love him.”

It was about a year after this, one Christmas morning, that Maggie, Lilian, Ernest, and I went up to place some flowers on John’s grave. As we were coming away, we passed the cripple to whom Doctor John had sent five shillings two years ago. Ernest Venner had taken it to him for me. I was about to feel in my pocket for something to give the

man, when I saw that Ernest Venner had stepped back. He placed two coins in the man's hand, and I heard him say : "In memory of Doctor John." I was walking at Maggie's side, and I am sure she heard him too. She said nothing, but I could see that she was touched by the incident.

"Mr. Venner is very kind," I said. "It was four or five shillings that he gave ; I saw the coins. It is much for him, for he is not by any means well off."

"It is very kind indeed of him," said Maggie, "to show such respect to John's memory."

That was all she said, and we walked on in silence.

It was a few weeks after this, that one evening, as Maggie and I were sitting round the fire, she said to me, with some little hesitancy :

"Phil, you can tell Mr. Venner—"

"Tell Mr. Venner?" said I dreamily, for it was almost a year since we had had the conversation already given to the reader. "Tell him what?"

"Well! what a question to ask me. Tell him that if—if he—"

"Why, of course," I remarked. "How dense I am."

"I really would much rather no hint was given," said Maggie ; "only you once said that his poverty would prevent him asking—"

"Yes, it would," I said decisively.

"Well, he needn't be poor any longer. You might offer him from me half my fortune."

"Why not offer it yourself?" I asked.

"How could I? The reason would be too obvious," was Maggie's answer.

A few weeks later—one Saturday evening—Ernest and I were seated talking. Lilian had gone to visit

her mother, and Maggie was busy over some household duty. I thought this would be a good opportunity to speak to Ernest, so I at once plunged into the subject with my usual abruptness.

"Ernest, why don't you marry?" I asked.

"I don't think I ever shall do that," he answered quietly.

"Why?" said I.

"Surely you must know," was his reply.

"But I don't know," I persisted. "I know that you once loved Maggie."

"*Once!*" he answered, almost sorrowfully. "Not once; there is no once with me. I always have—I always shall."

"Then," said I abruptly, "why not ask her to marry you? It was John's wish."

"Do you think I would tell her *that*? Use that knowledge to urge her to become my wife? No; if she cannot come to me of her own free-will, she will never come at all."

"But I *can* come, Ernest." The speaker was Maggie, who had entered the room behind us unheard. "That is," she continued falteringly, "if—if it is I you speak of?"

And what did Ernest say? Does it matter? I really do not know, for I left the room somewhat abruptly. I only remember that on the morrow he took for the text of his sermon these words: "The Lord made them to rejoice."

THE END

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